The secret of perfection : Britten: Britten and Verdi

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‘The Secret of Perfection’: Britten and Verdi

PhD

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Abstract

Writing in 1951, Britten declared that Verdi had 'discovered the secret of perfection' in his later operas. His enthusiastic admiration for Verdi is demonstrated frequently in his writings and interviews, but most profoundly in his music. This investigation of the influence of Verdi on Britten's works complements other studies in the field, notably those considering his works in relation to the English tradition (Purcell and Tippett), the German tradition (Mahler) and the Far East.

The Introduction discusses Britten's relationship with Neo-Romanticism and the theoretical implications of the study of musical influence. Chapter two focuses on historical and biographical evidence of Britten's relationship with Verdi through scores, recordings and attendance at performances. It goes on to investigate the role of Italy in the Romantic literary works that Britten prized, as well as in the work of his librettists, to reveal their construction of 'the South' as an invented space for homosexual fantasy.

Chapters three to nine analyse a collection of Britten's vocal works chronologically: *Peter Grimes*, *Albert Herring*, *Billy Budd*, *Gloriana*, *The Turn of the Screw*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *War Requiem*, and *Death in Venice*. Each work is considered in relation to the Verdian operas that Britten knew most intimately – *La traviata*, *Rigoletto*, *Aïda*, *Falstaff* and *Otello* – to reveal the ways in which he both embraces and resists Verdi's operatic approach, considering dramaturgy, genre, number opera structures, set piece forms, tonal design, recurring themes and *tinta*.

The Afterward explores the ways in which Britten's allusions to Verdi are assimilated, transformed, parodied and subverted through his oeuvre. It goes on to argue that Britten's relationship with tradition, in particular the Italian tradition epitomised by Verdi, contributes to his very individual musical 'modernism'.

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Glossary of Italian Terms

Aria	A large-scale solo usually in two contrasted movements [cavatina and cabaletta] and preceded by a scena.
Arioso	A lyrical passage with the character of an aria but in free from.
Cabaletta	The concluding, usually fast movement of an aria or duet.
Cavatina	Aria marking the singer's first appearance and the first movement in a large-scale set-piece.
Finale	Final ensemble of an act (tempo d'attacco, concertato, tempo di mezzo, stretta).
Introduzione	A complex of chorus, scena material and one or more cavatine occurring at the beginning of the opera after the prelude or overture.
Preghiera	Prayer
Recitativo	The declamatory or conversational part of an opera where the vocal line follows the free rhythm and accentuation of ordinary speech.
Scena	A complex of recitative, arioso, orchestral figuration and parlante preparatory to a formal number.
Stretta	Fast, concluding movement of an ensemble.
Tempo d'attacco	Fast first movement of a three movement duet or ensemble.
Tempo di mezzo	Free, transitional movement occurring between the cantabile/cavatina and cabaletta of a duet or ensemble.

Descriptions taken from Julian Budden, Verdi, ed. Stanley Sadie, J. M. Dent, London, pp. 389-91.

Introduction

'The Secret of Perfection': Britten and Verdi

In 1951 Benjamin Britten proclaimed that Verdi had achieved 'the secret of perfection' in his later operas.[1] This passionate declaration accompanied a detailed discussion of the elements of his predecessor's work that he most admired, including melodic construction, dramatic pacing and orchestral colour. He repeated this praise many times.[2] And it was not just in his writings that Britten alluded to the Italian tradition. Many of his early scores openly invoke the Italianate, including *Soirées Musicales* (1936) and *Matinées Musicales* (1941) (based on Rossini's *Guillaume Tell* and *Soirées Musicales*) and originally commissioned for a GPO film *The Tocher*, as well as the *Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo* (1940). This song cycle for tenor and piano is not only a setting of Italian poetry, but its vocal lines, shaped by affective *bel canto* nuances, are highly Verdian.[3] Furthermore, Michelangelo's poetry reveals a vein of homoeroticism, heightened by Britten's dramatic ordering and setting of the verses, which points towards a strong connection between the Italianate and male-male desire. This association is echoed in a number of his later song settings and opera plots.[4] His repeated assertions of Verdi as a predecessor, along with the rich network of Italianate resonances in the *Sonnets*, invites a detailed exploration of the influence of Verdi and the wider nineteenth-century Italian tradition on Britten's vocal works, the operas in particular.

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[1] Benjamin Britten, 'Verdi – A Symposium' (1951), *Britten on Music*, ed. Paul Kildea, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 101.
[2] Allusions to Verdi in Britten's writings are considered in chapter one.
[3] Jane Brandon, 'Suffolk *Bel Canto*: Benjamin Britten's *Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo* Op. 22 and the Italian "Other"', MMus Dissertation, 2004, available for consultation at the Britten-Pears Library, Aldeburgh (hereafter referred to as BPL).
[4] The link between homoeroticism and the Italianate is considered in chapter one.

The presence of Italianate allusions has not been considered extensively in the existing Britten literature, but numerous studies have focused on his relationship with other composers, notably: Arnold Whittall's study of Britten and Tippett (1990),[5] a collection of essays on Britten and Mahler in honour of Donald Mitchell (1995),[6] Mervyn Cooke's study of Britten and the Far East (1998),[7] and most recently Daniel Felsenfeld's study of Britten and Barber (2005).[8] Articles on the subject include Hans Keller's reflections on Britten and Mozart (1948)[9] and Lyn Henderson's consideration of Britten and Prokofiev (2003).[10] Other connections highlighted in the literature include associations between Britten and Purcell, Schubert, Berg, Stravinsky and Bernstein, as well as Weill, Milhaud, Hindemith, Markevich, Gerhard and Spinner.[11] In all of these studies, though in different ways, Britten's music is explored in relation to past and contemporary works to reveal his individuality through his relationship with musical 'others'.[12]

The extensiveness of this research field is intriguing and invites many possible explanations. Firstly, Keller's early article about Britten and Mozart is a clear, and even provocative, attempt to bring Britten's works to serious musicological attention; his music is 'elevated' by reference. Secondly, his place in British musical history, marking the culmination of the 'Second English Renaissance', may have prompted attempts to trace the backgrounds to his work. The perceived lack of eighteenth- and

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[5] Arnold Whittall, *The Music of Britten and Tippett: Studies in Themes and Techniques*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990.
[6] Philip Reed (ed.), *On Mahler and Britten: Essays in Honour of Donald Mitchell on his Seventieth Birthday*, Woodbridge, The Boydell Press, 1995.
[7] Mervyn Cooke, *Britten and the Far East: Asian Influences in the Music of Benjamin Britten*, Woodbridge, The Boydell Press, 1998.
[8] Daniel Felsenfeld, *Benjamin Britten and Samuel Barber: Their Lives and Their Music*, Pompton Plains, Amadeus Press, 2005.
[9] Hans Keller, 'Britten and Mozart: A Challenge in the Form of Variations on an Unfamiliar Theme', *Music & Letters*, Vol. 29, No. 1, 1948, pp. 17-30.
[10] Lyn Henderson, 'His Influence on Britten: The Vital Prokofiev', *The Musical Times*, Vol. 144, No. 1882, 2003, pp. 16-19.
[11] David Drew, 'Britten and His Fellow Composers: Six Footnotes for a Seventieth Birthday', *On Mahler and Britten*, p. 147.
[12] Whittall's work brings the lives of the two composers in parallel, making analytical comparisons and noting thematic similarities. The volume on Mahler and Britten consists of a series of essays concerning first Mahler and then Britten so that associations between the two composers may be inferred rather than made directly. Felsenfeld's book puts Britten's and Barber's lives and works in parallel, primarily from an amateur listener's perspective. Cooke's study is a detailed consideration of Britten's relationship with music of the Far East through his encounters with Colin McPhee, his visits to Bali and Japan, and the integration of these techniques in his work, particularly in *The Prince of the Pagodas*, *The Church Parables* and *Death in Venice*. Keller's work points to temperamental as well as stylistic similarities between Britten and Mozart. Henderson's article draws parallels between Prokofiev's ballet writing and Britten's *The Prince of the Pagodas*.

nineteenth-century English musical precedents is 'filled' with possible Continental predecessors. Thirdly, by emphasising parallels with 'modernist' composers – Tippett, Berg and Stravinsky in particular – Britten is aligned with ideas of 'progressiveness'. This alignment may also bear traces of a critical 'anxiety', the need to justify or explain the importance of his work in relation to his contemporaries. Fourthly, the presence of the 'other' in his music, symbolised by allusions to the exoticism of the Far East, complements extensive research into the homoerotic message of Britten's works as the two frequently inform each other. Fifthly, and perhaps most importantly, this critical pursuit is prompted by his pronouncements and the eclecticism of his music, bubbling with extra-textual references.[13] As he revealed: 'As a bee passes from flower to flower ... I do not see why I should lock myself inside a *purely personal idiom*. I write in the manner best suited to the words, theme or dramatic situation which I happen to be handling.'[14]

Thus, while Britten's relationship with other music has been considered, the presence of an Italian strand in this complex network of references has not been explored in detail. Malcolm Boyd's study of Britten's *War Requiem* and Verdi's *Requiem* is to date the most extensive examination of the subject.[15] More recently, Christopher Wintle's analysis of *Notturno* investigates what he terms the 'synthetic nature of Britten's achievement',[16] highlighting, amongst many other resonances, the work's Italianate melodic lines.

There are a number of possible reasons for this lack of emphasis. The 'popular' label of Verdian opera and critical rejection of his work in the early part of the twentieth century, taking the lead from later nineteenth-century assessments,[17] may well have coloured subsequent research trends. As Julian Budden puts it: 'Few composers have been as spectacularly revalued over the last fifty years as Verdi, especially in Britain ... for the majority [of inter-war critics] he was the composer of

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[13] Arnold Whittall, *Exploring Twentieth-Century Music: Tradition and Innovation*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 91.
[14] [My italics]. Benjamin Britten, quoted in: Hans Keller, 'Britten and Mozart', p. 26.
[15] Malcolm Boyd, 'Britten, Verdi and the Requiem', *Tempo*, No. 86, 1968, pp. 2-6.
[16] Christopher Wintle, *All the Gods: Benjamin Britten's* Night-piece *in Context*, London, Plumbago, 2006, p. 97.
[17] Gregory W. Harwood, 'Verdi Criticism', *The Cambridge Companion to Verdi*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 269.

Il trovatore who acquired respectability only in *Otello*, *Falstaff* and the *Requiem*.'[18] The popular appeal of his music, driven by the economics of the opera house, has significantly affected the critical reception of his work.[19] Virgil Thomson's article of 1940 is just one example of the type of criticism that Verdi frequently received. Talking of a performance of *Un ballo in maschera* he asserted:

> The lack of really delicate delicacy in Verdi's melodic contours, compensated though it be by pungent orchestration and the soundest dramatic building, makes the whole body of his work seem just a bit commercial. One is more often tempted, in fact, to take off one's hat to his triumphs of pure musical theatre than one is to bare one's head before any revelation of the subtleties of human sentiment or the depths of the human heart.[20]

His emphasis on Verdi's 'commercial' leanings and moments of 'musical theatre' is telling. What Roger Parker refers to as the 'Verdi Renaissance' in the 1930s meant the revival of his works, but not necessarily critical acclaim.[21]

However, the popularity of Verdi's operas may well have been a *motivating* factor in Britten's warmth towards his work. He frequently underlined his commitment to writing accessible music for the people and voices that he knew. In an article, aptly titled 'No Ivory Tower', of 1969, he wrote about what drew him to writing opera: 'I think it is the combination of the human being, in his or her daily life, with music that can point up the events in people's lives, and their emotions, in a most marvellous way.'[22] He continued, talking of what 'inspired' him to write:

> It's always, I think, the individual or the occasion. The individual in the sense that I've usually known, while writing an opera, who the singers would be. The occasion in the sense that the

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[18] Julian Budden, *Master Musicians: Verdi*, ed. Stanley Sadie, London, J. M. Dent, 1985, p. v.
[19] Fabrizio Della Seta, 'Some Difficulties in the Historiography of Italian Opera', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, Vol. 10, No. 1, 1998, p. 3.
[20] Virgil Thomson, 'The Verdi Case', *The New York Herald Tribune*, 8 December 1940, quoted in: *Virgil Thomson: A Reader. Selected Writings 1924-1984*, ed. Richard Kostelantz, New York, Routledge, 2002, p. 23.
[21] 'By the 1930s the "Renaissance" had spread, with revivals of "forgotten" works springing up all over Europe and America ... Verdi's music survived World War II relatively untarnished, as did his reputation as *'vate del risorgimento'*, the bard of Italy's achievement of statehood. In the 1950s and 60s his operas became the core repertory of the global opera industry, and since then the boom shows no signs of losing momentum.' Roger Parker, 'Verdi', *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, London, Macmillan, 2001.
[22] Benjamin Britten, 'No Ivory Tower' (1969), *Britten on Music*, p. 330.

> *War Requiem* was written for Coventry Cathedral's opening. That attracts me. I am the furthest removed from an ivory-tower composer that you can think of.[23]

This approach is reinforced by Britten's commitment to writing for young people and his Aldeburgh audiences.

Yet, as Whittall observes, Britten's music has often been aligned with the dispassionate and 'Apollonian' as opposed to the 'Dionysian'.[24] The identification of associations between his music and Verdi's may thus at first be considered far too 'Romantic', as they go beyond even the 'Dionysian' side of this classical dichotomy. Yet, as we shall see, Verdian allusion is part of a counter-tendency in his works towards the expressive and the melodramatic. Before considering the problems and rewards of the study of musical 'influence' it is useful to put Britten's allusions to Romanticism into a wider cultural context.

1. Britten and 'Neo-Romanticism'

Britten was one of many twentieth-century British artists to turn to Neo-Romanticism, especially between 1930 and 1950. Members of his own creative circle, notably John Piper and W. H. Auden, infused their works with allusions to nineteenth-century aesthetics. The term 'Neo-Romanticism', implying the reclamation of Romanticism, has been applied to many periods of musical thought from the early nineteenth century onwards, and its meaning is slippery.[25] There is an additional ambiguity when it is used in the twentieth-century context over whether it implies a detached, self-conscious and critical engagement with Romantic aesthetics and techniques, or a *continuation* of these. In Carl Dahlhaus' useful formulation, however, the term 'Neo-Romantic' may be applied to music with Romantic resonances that is *out of step* with

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[23] *Ibid.*, p. 332.
[24] Arnold Whittall, *Exploring Twentieth-century Music*, p. 91.
[25] 'The term originated, in the early nineteenth century, in literary theory, where it was used consistently to distinguish each successive kind of romanticism from the preceding one: at first the romanticism of circa 1800 from the literature of the Middle Ages and the early modern era; then French romanticism of 1830 onwards from the German romanticism of circa 1800; finally the revived romanticism of circa 1900 from the original, paradigmatic romanticism of a century earlier.' Carl Dahlhaus, *Between Romanticism and Modernism: Four Studies in the Music of the Later Nineteenth Century*, trans. Mary Whittall, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1980, p. 4.

prevailing cultural trends.[26] In this sense the tension between music and culture in the late nineteenth century is magnified when allusions to Romanticism emerge in the twentieth century.

Neo-Romantic visual art had a strong presence in early twentieth-century Britain. Britten's close collaborations with Piper, as well as Pears's extensive art collection featuring many British Neo-Romantic works, suggest that he was well acquainted with their approach. In a leading article – 'England's Climate' – Piper urged artists to 'rediscover'[27] techniques from the Romantic tradition, and to combine the communication of 'personal experience' with exploration of the potential of artistic materials: 'Life in painting ... is re-born from the material – paint and canvas, wood and stone.'[28] Further, Piper and his contemporaries (notably Graham Sutherland, John Craxton, Cecil Collins and Paul Nash) turned to the work of predominantly *English* artists including Constable (a favourite of Britten's), Turner, Blake, Bonington, Calvert, Cotman, Cox, Lawrence, Palmer, Raeburn, Rowlandson and Ward, borrowing 'techniques and subject matter'[29] and deriving pride from working in the English tradition.[30] Although Piper and his contemporaries did not form a unified artistic movement, they shared a strongly nationalistic Neo-Romanticism, reacting *against* the French domination of art in the preceding century.[31] Moreover, Piper's studies of cathedrals and other historic buildings were part of a broader attempt to reclaim something feared lost, a yearning towards the evocation of a utopian past in view of re-shaping the future.[32]

This reclamation of elements of Romanticism frequently resulted in an emphasis on mythical and mystical subjects and the centralisation of the plight of the individual

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[26] *Ibid.*, p. 5.
[27] John Piper, 'England's Climate', p. 6, quoted in: Stuart Sillars, *British Romantic Art and the Second World War*, London, Macmillan, 1991, p. 28.
[28] *Ibid.*, p. 28.
[29] Malcolm Yorke, *The Spirit of Place: Nine Neo-Romantic Artists and their Times*, London, Constable, 1988, p. 14.
[30] *Ibid.*, p. 14.
[31] Peter Woodcock, *The Enchanted Isle: The Neo-Romantic Vision from William Blake to the New Visionaries*, Glastonbury, Gothic Image Publications, 2000, p. 1.
[32] 'Where is the subject, or the object, or the subject or sub-object, or whatever it is your fancy to call it? In oblivion still? One thing is certain about all activities since cubism: artists have done their best to find something to replace the object that cubism destroyed. They have visited museums, and skidded back through the centuries, across whole continents and civilizations in their search.' John Piper, 'Lost, A Valuable Object', quoted in: Jane Alison and John Hoole, *A Paradise Lost: The Neo-Romantic Imagination in Britain 1935-55*, ed. David Mellor, London, Lund Humphries, 1987, p. 109.

within society. Personal engagement with the landscape and sense of place was also central to their project. Indeed, as in much Romantic painting, landscapes became 'external' symbols of 'internal' states, especially during the thirties and forties.[33] Furthermore, such art became part of war propaganda. In the 1940s, CEMA (the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts), for whom Britten and Pears worked on their return from America, used 'poetry, literature and the landscape … [to convey] the values and the very identity … Britain [was] fighting for'.[34] This political link was enhanced by Ministry of Information exhibitions. Pastoral 'idealism' thus became part of a very social and political project, meaning that a tendency towards nostalgic escapism was brought into a powerful tension with raw human concerns.

The Neo-Romantic 'voice' was strongest up to and including the 1951 Festival of Britain, although its influence was felt later and it was joined by another 'retrospective' movement: New Elizabethanism.[35] Moreover, the Festival of Britain, the Coronation and the rebuilding of Coventry Cathedral (with stained glass by John Piper) were all 'show-cases for the last stages of Neo-Romanticism'[36] and all events for which Britten composed: *Billy Budd* (1951), *Gloriana* (1953) and the *War Requiem* (1962).

The work of W. H. Auden, another close collaborator of Britten's, especially during the 1930s and 40s, was also touched by Neo-Romanticism. 'Letter to Lord Byron' (1936) and 'In Memory of W. B. Yeats' (1939) are a clear homage to his Romantic predecessors. Furthermore, his early political plays mark a return to the artistic and moral concerns of Byron and Shelley, particularly the resonances of *Paid on Both Sides* (1928) with Byron's *Manfred*.[37] Auden's commitment to this aesthetic was underlined through the publication of his works of 'New Romantic' poetry in the magazine *New Verse*,[38] alongside contributions by George Barker, Dylan Thomas and David Gascoyne. This is not to say that his work was prevailingly Neo-Romantic – his later poetry is a clear departure from the nineteenth-century aesthetic – but does

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[33] Stuart Sillers, *British Romantic Art and the Second World War*, p. 98.
[34] Jane Alison and John Hoole, *A Paradise Lost*, p. 12.
[35] Heather Wiebe, '"Now and England": Britten's *Gloriana* and the "New Elizabethans"', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, Vol. 17, No. 2, pp. 141-172.
[36] Jane Alison and John Hoole, *A Paradise Lost*, p. 25.
[37] Stuart Sillers, *British Romantic Art and the Second World War*, p. 5.
[38] Robert Hewison, *Under Siege: Literary Life in London 1939-45*, London, Methuen, 1988, p. 121.

highlight the Romantic resonances in his work. Like Piper, Auden frequently dealt with subjects relating to social alienation and the plight of the individual in the 'modern' age. He also asserted the need for human compassion, as evidenced by the famous line from 'September 1, 1939': 'We must love one another or die.'[39] (However, his exclusion of this poem from the 1966 edition of his *Collected Shorter Poems* suggests that he no longer believed unreservedly in this 'Romantic' sentiment later in life.)[40] For him, emphasis on the individual did not result in a withdrawal from public life but a direct engagement with it, as highlighted by his involvement with the GPO film unit. Films such as *Night Mail* (1936), with music by Britten, explored pressing social issues. We may even read Romanticism in the film: the portrayal of 'heroic figures' battling against the power of the machine age. Thus, Romantic individualism was combined, sometimes explosively, with realism. As Sillars notes:

> All of these [artists] share a further element which we may associate with earlier Romanticism; an intrinsic and passionate political commitment, whether it be found in Auden's early socialist poetry or the faith in the individual working-man in the films of Grierson and others. Throughout the forties Romanticism, this commitment to the individual remains strong, whether it lie in voicing the confusion of personal experience, or simply in revealing a strongly individual vision.[41]

Britten's choice of texts for his small-scale vocal works reveals a clear tendency towards Romantic literature (as well as to the hints of Neo-Romanticism in Auden's poetry and other twentieth-century writers).[42] This is similarly marked in his choice of operatic plots: George Crabbe (*Peter Grimes*); Guy de Maupassant (*Albert Herring*); Herman Melville (*Billy Budd*); Henry James (*The Turn of the Screw*). Moreover, the stories themselves deal with central themes of Neo-Romanticism. The sense of place is clearly played out in the windswept sea-scapes of *Peter Grimes*, revelling in the harshness of sea life. *The Turn of the Screw* invokes the 'Gothic' aspects of

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[39] *Ibid.*, p. 116.
[40] Stan Smith, 'Introduction', *The Cambridge Companion to W. H. Auden*, ed. Stan Smith, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 2.
[41] Stuart Sillars, *British Romantic Art and the Second World War*, p. 8.
[42] Britten's settings of Romantic poets: Hugo, Verlaine (*Quatre Chansons Francais*, 1928); Hopkins (*A M D G*, 1939); Rimbaud (*Les Illuminations*, 1939); Beddoes (*Two Songs*, 1942); Yeats (*Folk Song Arrangements*, Vol. 1 British Isles, 1943); Tennyson, Keats (*Serenade*, 1943); Crabbe (*Five Flower Songs*, 1950); Hardy (*Winter Words*, 1953 and 'If it's ever spring again', 1953); Shelley, Tennyson, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Keats (*Nocturne*, 1958); Blake (*Songs and Proverbs of William Blake*, 1965); Hölderlin, Tennyson, Shelley (*Voices for Today*, 1965); Pushkin (*The Poet's Echo*, 1965); Hardy (*The Oxen*, 1967).

Romanticism. Moreover, like Auden, Britten sought out socially relevant themes and the fate of the individual is repeatedly centralised, in *Billy Budd* in particular. Emphasis on the personal, emotional dilemma of Elizabeth in *Gloriana*, based on Lytton Strachey's *Elizabeth and Essex*, is an example of Britten exploring similarly 'Romantic' elements in a twentieth-century text. Thus, his turn to the past appears not to have been a nostalgic search for utopian visions or a *retreat* from reality. His focus on the heart-wrenching tensions between the community and the individual was central to his operas.[43]

In terms of musical language, Britten's tendency towards Neo-Romanticism resonated with a large number of other early twentieth-century figures. Indeed, his British predecessors, Vaughan Williams and the English pastoral school, may be considered part of this Neo-Romantic tendency. However, this is where obvious parallels begin to unravel. He reacted strongly against the music of his direct predecessors, turning away from the use of folk song and pastoral nostalgia. Other British Neo-Romantics – Arnold Bax, Gerald Finzi, William Walton[44] – were also representative of a very different musical project. Of these, however, Britten did warm to Walton's music, writing a positive review of *As You Like It* in 1936,[45] praising *Façade* for its allusions to the continental tradition in 1941,[46] and supporting the premiere of his opera *The Bear* in the Aldeburgh Festival of 1967.[47] (The relationship between Britten and his teacher Frank Bridge, who embraced Southern continental elements in his music, is also considered in chapter one.)

Furthermore, this turn to Romanticism, as Walter Simmons notes, was shared by a group of prominent American composers: Vittorio Giannini, Paul Creston, Samuel Barber, Nicolas Flagello, Howard Hanson and Ernest Bloch. Like Britten, they were caught in the fierce tensions between 'modernist' thought and Neo-Romanticism.[48] This was a tension frequently demonstrated in the reviews of Britten's works, which

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[43] Stuart Sillars, *British Romantic Art and the Second World War*, p. 183.
[44] Walter Simmons, *Voices in the Wilderness*, Lanham, The Scarecrow Press, 2004, p. 10.
[45] Benjamin Britten, '"As You Like It" Walton's Music' (1936), *Britten on Music*, p. 21.
[46] Benjamin Britten, 'England and the Folk-Art Problem' (1941), *Ibid.*, p. 31.
[47] Benjamin Britten, 'Britten Talks to Edmund Tracey' (1966), *Ibid.*, p. 298.
[48] Walter Simmons, *Voices in the Wilderness*, p. 2.

alternately criticised him for over-complexity and 'cleverness'[49] or pandering to 'popularity' through his use of 'retrospective' techniques. The work of Gian Carlo Menotti also provides an important parallel to Britten, through his allusions to Puccini.[50]

Therefore, although there is no direct connection between Britten's use of Romantic elements and these figures, they did share an impulse towards invoking the past as a way of resisting the ultra-modernism of the Boulez school in the 1950s and 60s and of keeping a link with tonality. In Britten's words, 'music has got to have a clear connection, it has got to have overtones. That is why I myself cannot work without some kind of – to put it in its simplest way – tonal centre. I must have a form of scale – though I don't say it must be a scale that people know or like.'[51] His extended tonal language, which incorporates many modal elements (and the techniques of serialism in his later works), richly explores the tonal system, but crucially does not abandon it.

The assertion of Britten as a 'Neo-Romantic' is thus to over-simplify the point. His music resists such easy categorization and his retrospective glances are sophisticatedly plural. I argue, here, that Italian Romanticism was an important strand in Britten's very individual engagement with the music of 'others', and that in accordance with his own compositional and dramatic aims he found elements in Verdi's musical thought that resonated with his own. Moreover, for Britten, Neo-Romanticism didn't involve a return to the language of high-Romanticism, or the uncritical absorption of past elements into his own music – his work is frequently highly self-reflective. Thus, while he was part of a wider tendency to engage with Romanticism the musical results are very different. Before introducing the structure of this study, the implications of 'influence', and the theories surrounding it, will be considered.

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[49] Donald Mitchell, 'Introduction', Benjamin Britten, *Letters from a Life*, Vol. I, ed. Donald Mitchell and Philip Reed, London, Faber & Faber, 1991, pp. 6-7.
[50] Richard Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music*, Vol. 5, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 227.
[51] Benjamin Britten, 'Britten Talks to Edmund Tracey' (1966), *Britten on Music*, p. 299.

2. 'Influence'

Musical influence is a fraught subject in the literature, especially as the recognition of resemblances is often understood as compromising originality. (According to Dahlhaus this striving for originality was itself a Romantic concept.)[52] The study of influence, Leonard Meyer suggests, is hampered by a reliance on the 'new' as a criterion for musical worth, and from a model of influence that suggests that past models act on *passive* later works.[53] However, as he goes on to observe this need not necessarily be the case, as re-use may itself be understood as an *active* creative act. Another frequently posited resistance concerns the implied 'elitism' of the study of influence, which suggests that it is used as a way of justifying artistic value and the inclusion or exclusion of works from a recognised canon.[54] Yet, the study of influence is pressing, especially in relation to the constant retrospective engagement of composers in the twentieth century. As Constant Lambert trenchantly put it in 1934, 'today every composer's overcoat has its corresponding hook in the cloakroom of the past'.[55]

Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence* has had far-reaching consequences in the study of music as well as literature.[56] His understanding of poetic influence, characterised by a tense Oedipal relationship between poets and their forebears ('fathers'), proposes that they misread their predecessors in order to clear creative space for their own work. He describes these misreadings in a series of 'revisionary ratios'.[57] This formulation highlights the ambivalent feelings that an artist may have towards significant past works, fusing a psychological and historiographical approach with analysis of poetry itself. This is highly relevant here, as although Britten's

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[52] Carl Dahlhaus, *Between Romanticism and Modernism*, p. 98.
[53] Leonard B. Meyer, 'Innovation, Choice, and the History of Music', *Critical Enquiry*, Vol. 9, No. 3, 1983, pp. 517-544.
[54] '[T]he concepts of influence and intertextuality have been sites of generational conflict: to many people, influence has smacked of elitism, the old boy networks of Major Authors and their sleek entourages ... especially Americans have used the term "intertextuality" in the context of enlargement ... concern with influence arose in conjunction with the mid-eighteenth-century interest in originality and genius, and the concept still bears the marks of that origin.' Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein, 'Figures in the Corpus: Theories of Influence and Intertextuality', *Influence and Intertextuality in Literary History*, Wisconsin, University of Wisconsin Press, 1991, p. 3.
[55] Constant Lambert, 'The Age of Pastiche' (1934), quoted in: Daniel Albright, *Modernism and Music: An Anthology of Sources*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2004, p. 299.
[56] Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997.
[57] *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.

written and spoken allusions to Verdi are unswervingly positive, his musical responses embody a tension between admiration and resistance.

Bloom's terms have subsequently entered the field of musicology, for example in Kevin Korsyn's study of influence in the works of Brahms.[58] Even more directly, Joseph Straus takes Bloom's 'revisionary ratios' and proposes new ones to describe specifically musical processes in the works of Stravinsky, Schoenberg, Bartók, Webern and Berg.[59] While this is enlightening in relation to the composers that he focuses on, the application of these terms to Britten's works is not direct. Not only does Britten rarely stray beyond the extended tonal realm, but as we shall see in the analysis that follows his *use* of Verdian elements is very different. However, Straus usefully distinguishes between three types of influence: influence as immaturity, influence as generosity and influence as anxiety. Although these types of influence are often interconnected and far from clear cut, the idea of generosity is pivotal here. Indeed, we may go even further. At times, Britten appears to view tradition as a necessary 'comfort'. Thus, these studies, rooted in a historiographical approach to literature and music, tackle not only the traces of influence manifest in the works considered but also the personal impetus for, and implications of, such allusions to the past.

However, Lloyd Whitesell criticises the male-centricity of Bloom's model, concluding that 'the creative potential of the artist is wielded as a form of phallic power'.[60] In his article, he uses Britten as an example of an artist who *relies* openly on the past rather than seeing tradition as the catalyst for creative conflict: 'Britten avowedly looks to his predecessors for support, company, sustenance, and instruction.'[61] Indeed, Britten openly acknowledged his need for tradition in an interview with Donald Mitchell in 1969:

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[58] Kevin Korsyn, 'Towards a New Poetics of Musical Influence', *Music Analysis*, Vol. 10, No. 1/2, 1991, pp. 3-72.
[59] Joseph N. Straus, *Remaking the Past: Musical Modernism and the Influence of the Tonal Tradition*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1990, p. 17; Joseph N. Straus, 'The "Anxiety of Influence" in Twentieth-Century Music', *The Journal of Musicology*, Vol. 9, No. 4, 1991, pp. 430-447.
[60] Lloyd Whitesell, 'Men with a Past: Music and the "Anxiety of Influence"', *Nineteenth-Century Music*, Vol. 18, No. 2, 1994, p. 155.
[61] *Ibid.*, p. 157.

Donald Mitchell: To a composer standing at the point of his life where you do today, you have a great inheritance, not only in your own music but also with regard to the past. I would like to ask you how it feels standing in that situation? And are you conscious of this wonderfully exciting but also great *burden* of tradition behind you?

Benjamin Britten: I'm *supported* by it, Donald. I couldn't be alone. I couldn't work alone. I can only work really because of the tradition that I am conscious of behind me. And not only the consciousness of the *musical* tradition, but the tradition of painting, and architecture, and countryside around me, people around me.[62]

Britten confirmed the point later in the same interview, on the subject of his *War Requiem*: 'After all, there are many similarities between all works presenting dramatic works to audiences, and I would think ... that it's useful to know how someone else has gone there ... And I think I would be a fool if I didn't take notice of how Mozart, Verdi, Dvořák – whoever you like to name – had written Masses.'[63] Yet, in 1963 he cast doubt on a simplistic understanding of influence by, rather defensively, asserting that his 'liking or disliking any of the great figures of the past ... [was] a purely personal matter, derived from temporary needs' and that he 'reserve[d] the right to change any of [his] opinions whenever [he] want[ed] to'.[64] These observations highlight his recognition of the importance of the relationship between earlier works and his own, even if they are at times guarded. Moreover, the notion of 'temporary needs' does not mean to say that any of the 'great figures' that Britten refers to – including Verdi – were insignificant in relation to his music. If he 'needed' them at some times and not at others, or at some times more than others (either in the compositional process or in describing his aesthetic position) then the needs of the moment are especially meaningful.

Michael Tippett underlines the depth of Britten's relationship with the past:

For if we consider the difficulties, not of the future for him, but simply of the past, we can see that Britten by his very gifts had his full share of the problems bequeathed to us all in this period. There being no single tradition now, each artist forges his links (or blows up his bridges) according solely to temperament and his individual *kairos*. Britten's *kairos* has never

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[62] Benjamin Britten, 'Mapreading' (1969), *Britten on Music*, p. 328.
[63] *Ibid.*, p. 329.
[64] Paul Kildea, 'Introduction', *Britten on Music*, p. 8.

been, even in extreme youth (nor will be in the future) to make his music out of destruction ... Britten must make his music out of his own creative gifts in relation *always* to the music of our forebears. So that he is inescapably involved in a fiendish problem of choice. That is, for each work he has to choose ... the style and substance afresh and in relation to some tradition.[65]

This emphasis on Britten's *reliance* on the past resonates with T. S. Eliot's essay *Tradition and the Individual Talent* (1919):

> The historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and compass a simultaneous order.[66]

However, as we shall see in the following analysis, Britten appears to have an ambivalent relationship with the music of his forebears in his works, both embracing *and* resisting it.

Turning to the musical manifestations of these influence relationships, we see that many pressing questions have been raised in the field of 'borrowing' about the amount of resemblance between works that point towards a meaningful connection. Charles Rosen, for example, raises the problem of absorbed quotation,[67] highlighting the paradox that 'the most important form of influence is that which provokes the most original and most personal work'.[68] Issues surrounding what may be termed the 'ethics' of borrowing have also featured strongly in such studies. However, as Peter Burkholder proposes, influence is pervasive and as much a part of building a tradition, as obvious allusion.[69] In his view, the ways and degrees to which this borrowing can take place range from overt quotation to more absorbed allusion.[70] This is useful here,

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[65] Michael Tippett, 'On Britten's 50th Birthday', *Tippett on Music*, ed. Meirion Bowen, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1995, p. 68.
[66] T. S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', *Selected Prose*, ed. John Hayward, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1963, p. 23.
[67] Charles Rosen, 'Influence: Plagiarism and Inspiration', *Nineteenth-Century Music*, Vol. 4, No. 2, 1980, pp. 87-100.
[68] *Ibid.*, p. 88.
[69] Peter Burkholder, 'Borrowing', *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*.
[70] J. Peter Burkholder, 'The Uses of Existing Music: Musical Borrowing as a Field', *Notes*, Vol. 50, No. 3, 1994, pp. 851-870.

as Britten alludes to Verdi with varying degrees of audibility. While he does come close to quotation, however, he never presents Verdian material un-transformed.

The ways in which musical resonance with past works may be analysed have been further enriched by theories of intertextuality taken from literary studies. Drawing on this, Michael Klein proposes that influence may be freed of chronology: 'Rather than view texts as links in a chain of influence, we can use the metaphor of a web to show that texts are interlinked in multiple directions'.[71] He also distinguishes between a series of types of intertextuality, ranging from 'poetic', which involves resonance with past works that the composer consciously invokes, to 'transhistorical', which involves resonance between works outside the boundaries of chronology and historicism.[72] The possibility of intertextual reference outside historical constraints not only opens up the possibility of introducing models that Britten may not have been consciously aware of, but of using *Britten's* re-uses to understand *Verdi*.

Furthermore, Roger Parker proposes a useful model of operatic intertextuality, with an emphasis on audience reception, focusing on operatic 'moments [that stray] into one another, confounding our sense of their separate fictional worlds'.[73] His comments refer to the infusion of elements from *Il trovatore* into *La traviata* (works composed by Verdi in close succession), and this concept is useful as it suggests that dramatic and musical parallels may be experienced simultaneously with the work itself. These 'doubles', according to Parker, may

> fruitfully connect. Particularly when we find them within famous works, our energies, perhaps attempting to match or trace the energies of the composer, will respond with complex interpretation; and the "deeper" the musical resemblance, the deeper are we encouraged to delve for meaning, to broaden and make more universal our interpretive strategies. There is a powerful pull here; but it is one about which we might occasionally be sceptical.[74]

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[71] Michael L. Klein, *Intertextuality in Western Art Music*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2005, p. 4.
[72] *Ibid.*, p. 12.
[73] Roger Parker, *Remaking the Song: Operatic Visions and Revisions from Handel to Berio*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2006, p. 13.
[74] *Ibid.*, p. 40.

Crucially, Parker hastens to step back from conclusive interpretation of these musical and dramatic parallels and lets them float as possibilities and multiplicities. This is helpful, both for its emphasis on the audience's perception of inter-textual reference and as a caution against rigid readings of musical association. Multiple resonances and interpretations may be kept in the air at once.

There are thus many pressing questions to be faced before embarking on a consideration of influence. How much must a reworking resemble the model for it to be termed 'modelling'? How much resemblance should be present to trace 'influence' in a broader sense? (Indeed, a later work may resemble the genre or 'general style' of an earlier composer as well as incorporating specific elements relating to a single work). Another layer of this question concerns the intentionality of the act of influence. Must references be conscious? And if so, how may we recognise those that are intentional and those that are unconscious? How can the music tell us about the relationship between the earlier and later works? Is influence in the ears of the listener? Is intertextual reference only circumscribed by the limits of our capacity to trace similarities? Moreover, influence may involve significant transformation, and many influences may come together in a work, melding together or reacting against each other.

This study considers the influence of Verdi and the wider nineteenth-century Italian operatic tradition on Britten in two parts. Firstly, chapter one charts Britten's 'biographical' relationship with Verdi's music: what he wrote about Verdi, which scores he knew, which performances he attended and so on. This is the psychological, historical dimension, which suggests possible parallels, grounded in Britten's historiography. However, this approach has limitations – we cannot know his 'real' feelings towards his models and his changing relationship with them. If taken as a series of suggestions of possible parallels, though, it can point us in the direction of meaningful musical references. Consideration of the 'visions' of Italy that feature in the Romantic and twentieth-century literature that Britten treasured also allows for a clearer understanding of what 'Italy' may have symbolised for him and his creative circle.

Secondly, in chapters two to nine, analysis of a range of Britten's operatic works and the *War Requiem* reveals the various levels of absorption or 'assimilation' of Verdian elements that characterise his music. These levels fall into three broad categories:

- Near-quotation
- Allusion – specific, generic
- 'Assimilation'[75]

These labels are not an attempt to formulate a methodology for the study of influence more widely, but rather categories that arise from and are useful for the consideration of Britten's work. His engagement with Italianate music ranges from near-quotation (where a significant amount of the original is present) to allusion and on to 'assimilation'. Allusion may be both specific (to a work or composer) and generic (to a wider generic category or to a historical period). Genette's distinction between hypertextuality and architextuality is also useful here. Hypertextuality refers to elements that relate to distinct models and architextuality to generic models.[76] Moreover, generic allusion may be further split between broad generic indicators – for example 'tragedy' – and generic indicators that are part of a more specific historical tradition – for example nineteenth-century Italian 'number' opera conventions. At times though, Britten appears to get very close to, in his terms, 'assimilating' Verdi's musical voice into his own.

Transformation is pivotal to Britten's treatment of near-quotation and allusion. The ways in which Britten manipulates Verdian processes may be described as:

- Transformation
- Parody – specific, generic
- Subversion – specific, generic

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[75] 'I believe contact with other countries, which means other styles, other schools of thought, to be essential to art ... Foreign influences must be assimilated - & not just blindly accepted'. Benjamin Britten, 'Speech tp the International Arts Guild' (1944), *Britten on Music*, p. 45.
[76] Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, trans. Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1997, pp. 9-12.

Britten frequently transforms Italianate allusions in his music by using individual elements and combining them with other processes, for example taking Verdi's melodic construction and applying it to a post-tonal context. This applies both to elements that are explicitly Verdian and to signifiers of the wider Italian tradition. Furthermore, parody is achieved through specific and generic self-consciousness, where humour is created through exaggeration and other destabilizing gestures. Subversion, defined here as a serious form of parody, occurs where Britten disrupts the expected meaning of his allusions, emptying them of their original significance and providing musical 'critique'. Thus, in what follows, each work is analysed with a focus on his *use* of specific elements of Verdi's music. It tells us much more about Britten's relationship with his models than would a passive chain of influence.

The works analysed here display a range of overt and covert allusions to Verdi and the wider Italian operatic tradition: *Peter Grimes*, *Albert Herring*, *Billy Budd*, *Gloriana*, *The Turn of the Screw*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the *War Requiem* and *Death in Venice*. (Although demonstrating some subtle allusions to Verdi, *The Rape of Lucretia* and *Owen Wingrave* are works that, in general, 'suppress' rather than celebrate the Italianate.) As we shall see, there is a shifting emphasis between those pieces that feature specifically Verdian allusions and those that display more general stylistic traits from the nineteenth-century Italian tradition. Furthermore, each chapter focuses on a particular aspect of Verdi's operatic writing that emerges most strongly in that work, covering: dramaturgy, tonality and tonal design, 'number' organisation, set-piece and vocal arch construction, generic scenes, recurring themes, intensification, and *tinta*.

The chronological arrangement allows for exploration of Britten's changing musical relationship with Verdi. There is a movement between the earlier works, where allusions are more frequently 'assimilated' and transformed, and the later works, where allusions are more frequently subverted and parodied. And it is this self-conscious manipulation of past materials that, as I shall argue in the 'Afterward', aligns Britten firmly with Modernism. Furthermore, Verdi represents one strand in a complex network of competing influences and thus, although the focus here is on allusions to the Italianate, reference is also made to other prominent musical

resonances. Paradoxically then, the 'Brittenesque' may be revealed precisely by exposing his transformations of the 'non-Brittenesque'.

Chapter I

Going South

Britten's relationship with Verdi and Italy was complex and extensive. Not only did he appreciate Verdi's music and have a deep understanding of it, but he had an enthusiasm for travelling south (frequently for the purpose of composition and performance as well as relaxation), and a taste for literature based on Mediterranean themes. In this chapter, consideration of this multifaceted relationship falls into two main parts. The first explores the references to Verdi found in Britten's writings and correspondence, the Verdi scores, recordings and performances with which he was acquainted, his appreciation of *bel canto* singing, and early critical appraisals of Verdian elements in his operas. The second focuses on his trips to Italy, Venice in particular, and his passion for literary 'inventions' of the nation, often tinged by homoeroticism. That he was drawn to the works of a wide range of Romantic artists who dealt with these themes (Byron, Shelley, Keats, Baron Corvo, Symonds) in addition to those of his contemporaries (Forster, Auden, Plomer, Sackville-West), is frequently revealed in his diaries and correspondence as well as in his choice of song texts and operatic subjects. The conclusion brings these strands together to consider their interrelationship and to draw attention to the interaction, and often conflict, between the dramatic subjects of Verdi's operas and the nationalistic associations of his music and these (very 'Northern') 'visions' of the Mediterranean, a conflict that is also played out in the operas themselves.

1. 'I need to know that I'm not alone'[1]: Britten on Verdi

On 24 October 1950 Lord Harewood, then editor of *Opera*, wrote to Britten:

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[1] Benjamin Britten, 'Mapreading' (1939), *Britten on Music*, p. 329.

We have a number of rather good illustrations for the Verdi number, which we found when we were in Italy last and Cecil Gray is writing about Verdi and Shakespeare. I thought it so dull to ask Toye or an Italian expert to write as it were an appreciation, that I finally decided the most interesting thing was to ask half a dozen English composers to say either where Verdi has influenced them, or whether they think he influences anyone, or what they have liked or got from his music, or just whether they like him and why.[2]

Britten replied on 26 October, agreeing to write an article about Verdi and offering a number of suggestions. These reveal as much about his relationship with his contemporaries as their relationship with his Italian predecessor:

> The Verdi idea is splendid – I only feel we might improve the list of composers. V. W. [Ralph Vaughan Williams], if he'll do it, would be good if provocative, *ditto* Michael T. [Tippett]. Willy [Walton], I thought you said, won't or can't write; Lennox [Berkeley] happens to be articulate, & adores Verdi, & as he's in the middle of an opera becomes eligible, I'd have thought. I think Bush would be valuable – his views might be surprising, but certainly interesting. Bliss is the best other, gloomy though the thought is – he's at least written & had performed an opera ... My feeling about the title is to leave the approach to Verdi to individual choice, & to subtitle. "Verdi – a Symposium" – & then "my experiences of" – by R. V. W.; – "my study of" – by L. Berkeley; my "stealing from" – by A. Bliss; the "social significance" of – by Bush; "The psychological importance of" – by Tippett; "my abject humility in front of" – by self.[3]

The issue was published in February 1951 and did indeed include entries by Vaughan Williams, Bliss, Berkeley and Britten. In his contribution Britten strongly asserts his enthusiasm for Verdi and he appears to have stood by these views well into the 1970s. When Harewood requested to read the article at a Verdi conference in Chicago organised by Mario Medici in 1974, Britten replied: 'I do still feel the same about [Verdi] and Puccini but I certainly would not express myself or seem so arrogant about a minor master [Puccini] today ... If, however, the second part (from the start of paragraph two) is of any use to you, please use it.'[4] Britten's oeuvre is thus framed by two assertions of his regard for Verdi, a devotion that, as we shall see, was based on acute critical insight.

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[2] BPL: Britten-Harewood correspondence archive.
[3] Benjamin Britten, *Letters from a Life*, Vol. III, pp. 623-4.
[4] 16 July 1974. BPL: Britten-Harewood correspondence archive.

In his contribution to 'Verdi – A Symposium', Britten begins by considering his initial scepticism towards the operas of Verdi and Puccini, *La traviata* and *La Bohème* in particular.

> Several years ago I had the occasion to hear a series of performances of those two old favourites, *Traviata* and *Bohème*. At the time my feelings towards Verdi and Puccini were about the same – both of them efficient, with routine and apt stage-craft, but not very interesting musically. So I was not surprised when after four or five performances I never wanted to hear *Bohème* again. In spite of its neatness, I became sickened by the cheapness and emptiness of the music. On the other hand, I was surprised to find myself looking forward with excitement to each successive performance of *Traviata*. In fact, after at least a dozen performances I felt I was only just beginning to know it, to appreciate its depths of emotion, and musical strength.[5]

His initial resistance reflects critical opinion of the time which, as we saw in the introduction, frequently emphasised the 'cheapness' and superficiality of Italian opera. In this context, it is even more striking that it was a work as popular as *La traviata* that persuaded him to change his mind.

Britten goes on to highlight four Verdian characteristics that he particularly admired. First, he praises the 'variety and strength of his melodies',[6] observing that repetitions of short phrases often lead to an effective climax, as in 'Parigi, o cara' from *La traviata*. He also notes the 'long casual lines'[7] that create unexpected 'deep' tensions in *Otello*, particularly the 'conversational duet'[8] between Otello and Desdemona at the close of act I.

Secondly, he emphasises Verdi's harmonic invention, citing the Egyptian trumpet tune in *Aïda* as an example of his ability to write 'a succession of the simplest harmonies in such a way as to sound surprising and yet "right"'.[9] Furthermore, he identifies Verdi's harmonic originality in the 'astounding string accompaniment to the

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[5] Benjamin Britten, 'Verdi – A Symposium' (1951), *Britten on Music*, p. 102.
[6] *Ibid.*, p. 102.
[7] *Ibid.*, p. 102.
[8] *Ibid.*, p. 102.
[9] *Ibid.*, p. 102.

bell strokes in the last scene of *Falstaff*, and the obscure *Ave Maria* "on an enigmatic scale" from the *Quattro pezzi sacri*'.[10]

Thirdly, he focuses on the relationship between voice and orchestra: 'The voices dominate, and the orchestra is the background – but what a background! In the later works especially, the orchestra has a range of colours wider than with any other composer.'[11] Here, he observes the delicacy of the *Nile* scene in *Aïda* and the stormy opening of *Otello*.

Fourth and finally, he enthuses over Verdian structure, at once noting that he 'balances numbers brilliantly'[12] in the early works, and that these 'numbers melt into each other with a really astonishing subtlety'[13] in the later works, particularly *Otello* and *Falstaff*. As we shall see, these comments frequently highlight aspects of Verdi's operas that resonate strongly with Britten's *existing* compositional ideals as well as demonstrating deep admiration and critical insight.

The article ends with a biographical, and highly idealised, image of Verdi in which Britten describes 'his vitality, his breadth of humanity, his courage [and] his extraordinary career which developed into an almost divine serenity'.[14] This virtual deification compounds Britten's 'abject humility' before his forebear, and this personal image was perhaps based on Verdi's letters, a volume of which Britten kept in his library. As Keller notes, Britten frequently adopted such 'father figures' as a result of 'superego identification'.[15] According to Humphrey Carpenter, too, this may well have been symptomatic of the creative and emotional anxiety that haunted Britten: his depressions were notorious.[16] Britten wrote tellingly to Pears in 1963: 'I suppose one can't help having weak spots, and being a jumpy neurotic type – but … it isn't fun to feel like the wrong end of a broken down bus for most of the time'.[17] It

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[10] *Ibid.*, p. 102.
[11] *Ibid.*, p. 102.
[12] *Ibid.*, p. 103.
[13] *Ibid.*, p. 103.
[14] *Ibid.*, p. 103.
[15] Hans Keller, 'Britten and Mozart', p. 166.
[16] Humphrey Carpenter, *Benjamin Britten: A Biography*, London, Faber & Faber, 1992.
[17] *Ibid.*, p. 418.

may well have been these insecurities that prompted him to identify with, in his terms, a pantheon of historical 'masters', Mozart and Purcell as well as Verdi.

Britten thus not only explored the aspects of Verdi's music that he found most affecting, but also highlighted particular works that he considered important: *La traviata*, *Aïda*, *Otello* and *Falstaff*. However, as we shall see, his understanding of Verdi's oeuvre went far beyond these operas. The focus on his later works, though, never shifted. At the very close of the article he states: 'I am an arrogant and impatient listener; but in the case of a few composers, a very few, when I hear a work I do not like I'm convinced it is my own fault. Verdi is one of these composers.'[18] His admiration was therefore not indiscriminate: there were works that he didn't like, even if he preferred to blame the failing on himself.

References to Verdi abound in Britten's other writings and recorded interviews. From the outset, Britten associated Verdi with compositional clarity. In 1944 he observed: 'I've always inclined to the clear and clean – the "slender" sound of, say, Mozart or Verdi or Mahler.'[19] This is the first of many pairings of Verdi with Mozart. They are mentioned together again in 1951 in a discussion of emotional communication in opera: 'It is not enough to know *roughly* what is happening at a particular moment; if one thinks with what infinite precision a Mozart or a Verdi points the smallest word or tiniest shade of emotion, that will be clear.'[20] With regard to subtlety of language it is significant that Britten's experience of Italian opera, including the 1943 performances with Pears, were predominantly in English translation. He explained: 'Because I do not speak Italian, it was not until I heard Mozart and Verdi operas sung in English that I realised to the full their fabulous subtlety, wit and dramatic aptitude'.[21] (By this time, however, he had set Italian in *The Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo*.)

Moreover, Britten acknowledged the effect of Verdi and Mozart on his own writing. In a recorded interview of 1966 he suggested:

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[18] Benjamin Britten, *Britten on Music*, p. 103.
[19] Benjamin Britten, 'Conversation' (1944), *Britten on Music*, p. 44.
[20] Benjamin Britten, 'The Rise of English Opera' (1951), *Britten on Music*, p. 112.
[21] Benjamin Britten, 'On Writing English Opera' (1960), *Britten on Music*, p. 209.

> The influence of Mozart and Verdi, of course, is more obvious [than Berg's *Wozzeck*]. The wonderful stage craft and wit and aptness of Mozart; Verdi's trust in melody and his sense of form – both these composers taught me a great deal. I was particularly influenced by the sectional division of the operas which Verdi uses all his life – working on different dramatic layers rather than the slope up and down that other composers have used.[22]

Furthermore, Britten noted the melodic strength of Verdi's music even in his chamber works. Writing about the String Quartet in E minor he observed: 'It is full of the same honesty, simplicity and melodic strength which characterise all the operas we know and love so well'.[23]

Britten's enthusiasm for Verdi, and his recognition of this Italianate musical influence in his own works, was part of his general admiration for the European tradition, and on many occasions he defended the repertoire. In 1940, for example, he highlighted the importance of balancing 'Englishness' with continental influences, suggesting that it was important to look beyond 'tame imitations of the European masters',[24] but that 'complete rejection of the great European tradition is equally fatal, for, after all that tradition is nothing but centuries of experience of what people like to hear and what players like to play'.[25] Moreover, it was Stravinsky's ability to draw 'inspiration *from every age* of music' in *Oedipus Rex* that for Britten satisfied 'every aesthetic and emotional demand'.[26] He identified the *Italian* elements in Stravinsky's vocabulary, too, believing that his music should be sung in a *bel canto* manner: 'Oedipus was entirely miscast; the *bel canto* of a Latin tenor is needed rather than teutonic "Tristan style"'.[27]

Much has been made about Britten's admiration of Austro-German music, in particular that of Mahler. Yet, the Franco-Italian tradition appears to have been at least as significant. Indeed, at times Britten takes on a decidedly anti-German stance, praising Frank Bridge's allusions to the French tradition and admiring the work of other Franco-Italian composers *as opposed to* German ones. He observed: '[Bridge's]

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[22] Benjamin Britten, 'Britten Talks to Edmund Tracey' (1966), *Britten on Music*, p. 293
[23] Benjamin Britten, 'String Quartet in E minor' (1973), *Britten on Music*, p. 430.
[24] Benjamin Britten, 'An English Composer Sees America' (1940), *Britten on Music*, p. 26.
[25] *Ibid.*, p. 27.
[26] My italics. Benjamin Britten, 'Shostakowitch's "Lady Macbeth"' (1936), *Britten on Music*, p. 17.
[27] *Ibid.*, p. 18.

inclination was instinctively towards the French tradition of skill, grace and good workmanship, and away from 19th-century German decadence'.[28] Moreover, he described the German tradition that Bridge turned away from as a school of music 'really in the doldrums. The headmaster was Brahms, chief assistant masters, Schumann and Mendelssohn; the dancing-master, Dvořák, and of course above all, the chairman of the governors – Beethoven.'[29] (Britten's objections to Beethoven are well known, although his rejection was not total: receiving the *Fidelio* score was a red letter day in his childhood.) Rather morbidly, he characterised artists at the turn of the century as a collection of 'young composers … sick to death of [the] preponderating German influence which had been stifling English music for 150 years'.[30] Yet for all that, Britten never appears to have disregarded the 'Classical' tradition, as his praise for Mozart demonstrates.

References to Franco-Italian composers thus abound. He notes the 'superb melodic gift and … vivid and original imagination for colours' of Chopin, the 'daring and surprising harmonies, and always beautifully imaginative textures' of Fauré, and the '"loveable" contrasts of Poulenc'.[31] References to Italian composers other than Verdi are also frequent, although often ambivalent. He saw Donizetti as a 'popular' though not necessarily 'great' composer and posited a questionable lineage between his operatic style and modern jazz: 'To me the line seems clearly to proceed through jazz, ragtime, Victorian popular song back to the lighter Italian operas (Rossini, Donizetti, and early Verdi, with their frequent dotted rhythms) and Johann Strauss, to be coloured by the luscious harmony of Debussy, Franck and Delius'.[32] He also states quite categorically that 'no one would dream, for instance, of founding a school upon the music of a composer like Donizetti.'[33] (This view becomes particularly pertinent in relation to the overt parody of Italian opera in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, as discussed in chapter seven.)

The same ambivalence emerges from his comments about Puccini. As seen above, in the 1951 article he goes as far as saying that he was 'sickened by the

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[28] Benjamin Britten, 'Frank Bridge and English Chamber Music' (1947), *Britten on Music*, p. 75.
[29] *Ibid.*, p. 75.
[30] Benjamin Britten, 'An English Composer Sees America' (1940), *Britten on Music*, p. 27.
[31] Benjamin Britten, 'Francis Poulenc 1899-1963' (1964), *Britten on Music*, p. 254.
[32] Benjamin Britten, 'England and the Folk-Art Problem' (1941), *Britten on Music*, p. 32.
[33] *Ibid.*, p. 33.

cheapness and emptiness'[34] of Puccini's music after hearing *La bohème* at Sadler's Wells. Later, he not only rescinded this remark when the article was presented by Lord Harewood at a conference in 1973, but elsewhere offered (somewhat veiled) praise for his stage-craft: 'What makes Puccini a greater composer of operas than, in my humble opinion, a great composer, is that he knows how long it takes a person to cross the room. That can only come from having the operas produced.'[35] He also displayed criticism and admiration towards Bellini. In a letter to Mary Potter from Venice, dated 25 January 1964, he stated:

> Peter & I are settled in a rambling flat in a crazy old Palazzo on the Grand Canal. Very quiet & good for working in (only I'm a bit stupid so far) ... We went to a particularly old Bellini opera at La Fenice (*Beatrice di Tende*), but couldn't stick more than an Act (a pretty long one, though).[36]

Yet, Britten is said to have responded to a performance of Bellini's *Norma* in 1952 by exclaiming: 'If *only* I could write a real tune – one day I will'.[37]

In turning from German Romanticism to the musical South Britten stated that it was in answer to Nietzsche's call to '*Mediterraneanize* music'.[38] This was underlined by his early setting of the *Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo*. Although the subtleties of Nietzsche's later stance against Wagner and for Bizet are not elaborated, it is likely that the attitude was knowingly embraced. Britten and Pears owned a book of Nietzschian extracts (including sections from *The Case of Wagner* and *Nietzsche Contra Wagner*) edited by Heinrich Mann.[39] Nietzsche's thought may even have been a subject of conversation in the Mayer household while Britten and Pears were resident there, as the Manns were frequent visitors. Britten too, like Bizet, came to write music that did not 'sweat'.

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[34] *Ibid.*, p. 102.
[35] Benjamin Britten, 'The Arts Council and Opera' (1950), *Britten on Music*, p. 96.
[36] BPL: Britten-Potter correspondence archive.
[37] Christopher Headington, *Peter Pears: A Biography*, London, Faber & Faber, 1992, p. 312.
[38] My italics. Britten stated in an interview in 1963 that 'with both the French and the Italian [in *Les Illuminations* and *The Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo*] I was perhaps responding to Nietzsche's call to "Mediterraneanize music". The Italian songs have predominantly sunny lines.' *Ibid.*, p. 230.
[39] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Living Thoughts of Nietzsche*, introduced by Heinrich Mann, London, Cassell, 1939.

The question of Britten's relationship with Wagner, however, is complex. As Mitchell observes, Britten's collection of Wagner scores in the 1940s was the largest of any composer that he owned. Furthermore, as we shall see, many typically Wagnerian gestures *are* apparent in his works. What is also clear is that this influence is balanced and often challenged by that of the Italian tradition, resulting in a creative tension evident not only in Britten's writings, but in the works themselves.

If Britten turned to Italian and specifically Verdian models to embrace tradition and in part to oppose the prevailing influence of German music, he also did it in opposition to *English* music, in particular the folk-art school of the preceding generation. He therefore identified two schools of composition, the first embracing the European tradition and the other marginalising it:

> Elgar represents the professional point of view, which emphasises the importance of technical efficiency and welcomes any foreign influences that can be profitably assimilated. Parry and his followers, with the Royal College of Music as their centre, have stressed the amateur idea and they have encouraged folk-art, its collecting and teaching. They are inclined to suspect technical brilliance as being superficial and insincere.[40]

However, Britten *was* interested in folk-art on his own terms, as attested by his arrangements of British and French folk songs. Further, as Brett notes, he frequently engaged with other quintessentially English genres, choral music in particular.[41] In addition, he acknowledged the influence of Purcell, whose music, too, incorporated many Franco-Italian elements.

Britten appeared uneasy, however, about the *nature* of influence and the form that it should take. On the one hand he suggested that imitation, and indeed arrangements, were fruitful and on the other hand he sometimes displayed an anxious and even defensive attitude towards the recognition of Italian works as models. About his arrangements of Rossini's *Guillaume Tell* in *Soirées musicales* and *Matinées musicales*, for example, he said: 'I don't believe in the "copy right" of the material of

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[40] *Ibid.*, p. 31.
[41] Philip Brett, 'Keeping the Straight Line Intact? Britten's Relation to Folksong, Purcell, and His English Predecessors', *Music and Sexuality in Britten: Selected Essays*, ed. George E. Haggerty, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2006, pp. 154-171.

music',[42] concluding: 'I also support the idea of transcriptions, especially against many who think it inartistic, because it can extend the possibilities of hearing the music ... I could easily imagine that a transcription by a master of a work by a minor contemporary could be better than the original.'[43] He frequently outlined his reliance on the music of the past, as we saw in the Introduction, and yet time and again appeared to feel the need to defend his approach against charges of pastiche.

Clearly, Britten saw connections between the past and the present as musically vital. If anything is wrong, it is not allusion but an inability to *assimilate* these allusions fully into his own. He wrote:

> I believe contact with other countries, which means other styles, other schools of thought, to be essential to art ... Foreign influences must be *assimilated* - & not just blindly accepted – we know only too well the little Mendelssohns of the 19th century, & little Brahmses, Hindemiths and Debussys of a later date ... We in England need the stimulus of the foreign country in music – think of what we can learn from say – *France* – consciousness of sound, perfection of detail. From *Germany*, intellectual control, formal balance, & seriousness. From *Italy*, that wonderful sensuous melodic line – born of a country of fine voices.[44]

In the end, then, his ideal appears to be absorption of an array of European influences, Franco-Italian *and* German (as well as Russian). Moreover, this assimilation is not a disavowal of his nationality. As he noted: 'Even when I visit countries as glorious as Italy ... I am always home-sick, and glad to get back to Suffolk'.[45] He appeared to be musically homesick too. In addition to the tension between Germanic and Franco-Italian influences there is also one between continental and English ones. Furthermore, in the later works, these already myriad resonances are combined with a multitude of other allusions, notably to the music of the Far East.

Britten's relationship with Verdi's music is thus complex. His comment, and even more his music, is rife with tensions between the past and the present, English tradition and European allusion, pastiche and assimilation. It is in these fissures that an exploration of Britten's Italianate musical temperament may fruitfully begin.

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[42] Benjamin Britten, 'Conversation with Benjamin Britten' (1944), *Britten on Music*, p. 44.
[43] *Ibid.*, p. 44.
[44] *Ibid.*, p. 45.
[45] Benjamin Britten, 'Freeman of Lowestoft' (1951), *Britten on Music*, p. 108.

2. 'Hats off, gentlemen!!':[46] Britten's collection of scores and recordings and attendance at performances

Britten's relationship with Italian music is underlined by the scale of his acquaintance with Verdi's operas through scores, recordings and attendance at performances.

Britten's and Pears's collection of Verdi scores was extensive. As Appendix I shows, they owned copies (and often multiple copies) of the majority of his output, including more obscure works such as *I due Foscari* and *Il finto Stanislao*. (The chart consists of the title of each publication, its owner, date (if available), dedication and annotations.) Versions of single arias and duets also feature in the collection. The list includes the Verdi scores now held in the Britten-Pears Library, including copies owned by musicians that Britten and Pears worked closely with, for example Joan Cross, Terence Reeves and Rosamund Strode.

Of particular note are two types of scores: those that Britten acknowledged in his correspondence and those that he annotated. The first of these includes the Troubadour's song from *Il trovatore* arranged for piano. This came from the Britten family collection and, as Mitchell has pointed out, it probably formed part of his prodigious home music-making.[47] Another Verdi score also has a family connection. On 23 April 1932, Britten wrote in his diary: 'I borrow vocal scores of *Elektra* & *Otello* (which used to belong to Uncle Willie)'.[48] Indeed, Britten and Pears later owned multiple copies of *Otello*, and the score in question (published in 1913) contains small pencil annotations in Britten's hand. In the final duet in act I, occasional dynamics are circled and wavy lines (presumably *rubato* indications) suggest that it was used for rehearsal purposes, perhaps with Pears singing and Britten at the piano. Moreover, the act III scene ii duet, again between Desdemona and Otello, is marked: dynamics are circled, octave transpositions added, notes about orchestral instruments inserted, and slight articulation changes made to the right-hand

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[46] Benjamin Britten, *Letters from a Life*, Vol. I, p. 355.
[47] Donald Mitchell, 'Introduction', Benjamin Britten, *Letters from a Life*, Vol. I, p. 14.
[48] *Ibid.*, p. 246.

piano part. It appears that Britten learnt Verdi's music not only through score-reading and listening but also through *playing*.

In the same year (1932) he obtained a copy of the *String Quartet* in E minor, and two years later (1934) a copy of the *Requiem*. Careful listening is evident here, as the score includes pencil 'corrections' of occasional word placement and of missing accidentals. (It is interesting to note that it was not until 1962 that the *War Requiem* with its clear allusions to Verdi's work was completed, as discussed in chapter eight.) Britten also became acquainted with *Rigoletto* very early in his career. On 29 December 1938 he wrote to Ralph Hawkes (his publisher): 'Thank you very, very much for the score. I am extremely grateful & if you can believe it, there's nothing I'd rather have had.'[49] This effusive praise signals the importance that he attached to the work.

The next important acquisition was *Falstaff*. Three copies are of particular interest: the vocal score obtained by Britten in Amsterdam in 1946, the score given to Britten on his birthday by Pears (with no indication of year) and a rare facsimile of the original manuscript given by Marion and George Harewood in 1951. Once again Britten and Pears appear to have rehearsed the piece, and in the second score Bardolf's part is circled and occasional numbers (presumably acting as rhythmic reminders) are added. The work is clearly linked to Britten's own oeuvre. Harewood's dedication reads: 'For Ben's birthday – and "Billy Budd's" With love, Marion, George [Harewood] Nov. 22nd – Dec. 1st 1951.'

Despite Britten's purportedly critical approach to Donizetti and Rossini their scores also feature in the collection [Appendices II and III]. Of particular interest is Pears's copy of *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (with annotations), Britten's copy of *Moses in Egypt: An Oratorio* (with a list of characters in Britten's hand on the contents page), *La regatta veneziana: tre canzonette in dialetto veneziano* with Britten's and Pears's annotations, and Pears's copy of *Messe solennelle*. The copies owned by Joan Cross, Rosamund Strode and others give some indication of the Italian performance background around Britten, even if it did not always involve him directly.

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[49] *Ibid.*, p. 597.

Moreover, Britten's collection of recordings includes a substantial number of Verdian examples. Because of the restrictions of time on older records, these are usually single *arie* or *musiche d'insieme* [Appendix IV]. (In the chart the recordings are arranged by date of acquisition.) These include extracts from: *Aïda*, *Un ballo in maschera*, *Ernani*, *Falstaff*, *Luisa Miller*, *Otello*, the *Requiem Mass*, *Rigoletto*, *Simone Boccanegra*, *La traviata* and *Il trovatore*. As well as famous names in Verdi performance such as Tito Gobbi (Iago in *Otello*) and G. Gatti (Desdemona) the collection also features singers that Britten worked with: Joan Cross ('Willow Song' and 'Ave Maria' from *Otello*, and 'Quel son, quelle preci' from *Il trovatore*), Nancy Evans ('Willow Song' from *Otello* and the *Requiem*) and Heather Harper ('Sempre libera' and 'Addio del passato' from *La traviata*).

Documentary evidence showing which Verdi concerts Britten attended is scarce. However, in his diary he mentions a performance of the 'Willow Song' and 'Ave Maria' from *Otello* with Miriam Licette and the BBC Symphony Orchestra on 25 January 1931 and of the opening of *Otello* on 24 September 1932. A more detailed appraisal, this time relating to a performance of *Falstaff* in Vienna, comes in a letter to Grace Williams, dated 8 November 1934:

> *Falstaff* last night. Vienna went mad over this last – it was a new production & the applause lasted for nearly a quarter of an hour – Prohaska (from Berlin) & Krauss coming back time after time. Grace – you must admit that this is great stuff – I don't expect you to accept early Verdi – but the *Requiem*, *Otello*, & this, was *thrilling*.'[50]

Furthermore, in his diary on 7 November he wrote: 'The greatest honours go to old Verdi – for his glorious score – humour, tenderness abounding, & the glorious fugue to end. Hats off, Gentlemen!!'[51]

That Britten was enthusiastic about performances of 'middle' Verdi as well as 'late' Verdi is clear from the introduction to his 1951 article in which he recounts his enraptured attendance at over a dozen performances of *La traviata* in 1943, as discussed above. After this, sources of Britten's appreciation of Verdi in performance

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[50] Benjamin Britten, *Letters from a Life*, Vol. I, p. 354.
[51] *Ibid.*, p. 355.

dwindle, but the trend has been established. As in his writings, it appears that his enthusiasm was consolidated during the 40s and early 50s.

3. 'The golden box':[52] Pears and *bel canto*

Verdian performance and *bel canto* singing were a constant concern in Britten's shared musical life with Pears. In an interview with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in 1968 he said:

> I think that the acme of perfection in the art – in music art – is the human voice singing beautifully beautiful music ... [for example] one's mother [singing] over one, trying to make one go to sleep when one's two years old and having a restless night.[53]

This idealisation of his mother's voice was mirrored by his deep fascination with the voice of Pears. Indeed, according to Basil Reeve, the two voices were remarkably similar: the voice of his childhood became the voice of his music.[54]

Talking of his early relationship with Pears's voice, Britten remarked:

> I was attracted, even in those early days, by his voice, which seemed to me to emanate from a personality, and not, like many other voices, to be a manufactured affair, super-imposed ... Added to this his flexible voice, with from the beginnings an excellent technique, enabled us to explore music from widely different styles: from the early lutenists ... and Purcell and Bach, through 19th century Lieder, and French and Russian songs, to the moderns and including operatic arias of all epochs and countries. [55]

Furthermore, a letter to Pears dated 11 February 1944 demonstrates the close connection between his compositional thinking and Pears's singing: 'I'm writing some lovely things for you to sing – I write every note with your heavenly voice in my head.'[56] That this involvement with his voice was emotional as well as creative is demonstrated in a letter of November 1943: 'It was heaven to hear your voice, & to know you're feeling better. Practise hard & get the golden box back in its proper

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[52] *Ibid.*, p. 14.
[53] *Ibid.*, p. 9.
[54] *Ibid.*, p. 14.
[55] Benjamin Britten, *Letters from a Life*, Vol. III, p. 582.
[56] Benjamin Britten, *Letters from a Life*, Vol. II, p. 1187.

working order again. Something goes wrong with my life when that's not functioning properly.'[57] The performance that Britten had listened to was of Verdi.

For Pears, too, singing was an emotional as well as a technical matter. He wrote:

> A voice is a person ... each performance should be an act of love. And Music says, 'Love me'. It does not say 'Obey me'; it does not even say 'This is true'. Love me or love with me. That is why the performer is the centre of this act of love: he is the instrument of it. His duty is to offer himself as a sacrifice to those who have ears to hear ... the first part of his responsibility therefore is to come to some sort of terms with them, these weapons, with the breath which is the engine, with the larynx which is the second maker, the pharynx which is the resonator, and the lips, tongue and teeth which make up the articulator. These have got to be controlled and balanced: they have to be slowly exercised and practised and improved. Quality of sound, agility, a certain minimum quantity of sound for all practical purposes, flexibility of light and shade, these are part and parcel of the furniture of a singer's abode.[58]

Indeed, Pears retained his interest in the technical aspects of singing, and in particular *bel canto* singing, well into the 1970s.

Britten was apparently extremely sensitive to Pears's vocal development, and his correspondence frequently includes assessments of his progress while studying with Campbell McInnes,[59] Therese Schnabel[60] and Clytie Mundy.[61] He was also well aware of Pears's singing tutor books, including William Shakespeare's *The Art of Singing*, which covered *bel canto* technique.[62] John Evans, too, recalls 'Peter coming back from a performance of *Otello* at Covent Garden with Placido Domingo and Margaret Price, and saying "I've been for a singing lesson to London."'[63]

Moreover, Pears's grounding in the *bel canto* school was underlined by his relationship with his teacher Lucie Manén, author of *The Art of Singing* and *Bel*

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[57] Benjamin Britten, *Letters from a Life*, Vol. I, p. 14.
[58] Christopher Headington, *Peter Pears: A Biography*, p. 306.
[59] *Ibid.*, p. 89.
[60] *Ibid.*, p. 98.
[61] *Ibid.*, p. 98.
[62] Cornelius L. Reid, *Bel Canto: Principles and Practices*, New York, The Joseph Paterson Music House, 1978.
[63] Humphrey Carpenter, *Benjamin Britten: A Biography*, p. 471.

Canto.[64] As well as being a singer herself Manén was an expert in vocal anatomy, and her books provide detailed descriptions of vocal technique. *The Art of Singing* begins with a forward written by Pears, which both asserts his admiration for her teaching and praises her ideals for vocal technique:

> A lesson with Lucie Manén can indeed explore many tracks of unfamiliar country – anatomical, acoustic, aesthetic, scientific – but it is, finally, the acuteness of her ear which delights and astounds her pupils ... her rediscovery and interpretation of Caccini's *Esclamazione* and her insistence on the *Imposto* are only two of the many enthralling points ... I hail this manual with gratitude and delight.[65]

The volume even includes a vinyl recording of Pears singing extracts from Verdi's *La traviata* as examples.

The relationship between Manén and Pears was very close, and one which Britten followed intimately. She wrote of this relationship:

> With enthusiasm and zest he studied with me like any youngster [from 1965], ambitious and very favoured by his natural artistic gifts and skills. No sooner had he mastered the grammar of my teaching, the attack of the tone from the *imposto*, to *cantare con la gorga* on *esclamazione* (Caccini) than he was eager to try it out by himself before an audience. It was a success! 'You have given Peter a new lease of life,' said Ben over the telephone.[66]

Britten and Pears both acknowledged the profound effect of Manén's teaching on his singing. Britten noted: 'It is a great thing for Peter that he has met you and worked with you, Lucie, it has added something considerable to his life ...'[67] and Pears wrote gratefully:

> How incredibly lucky I was to 'find' you just at the time when I most needed you, and how wonderfully understanding you have been to me for – how many years? It was all part of my 'destiny – fate – good fortune' that I should go to far-and-away the most intelligent teacher I had ever met, just at the time when I was ripe enough to profit from her (and to stand up to

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[64] Lucie Manén, *The Art of Singing: A Manual*, London, Faber Music, 1974; Lucie Manén, *Bel Canto: The Teaching of the Classical Italian Song-Schools, Its Decline and Restoration*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1987.
[65] Lucie Manén, *The Art of Singing: A Manual*, p. 7.
[66] *Ibid.*, p. 193.
[67] *Ibid.*, p. 193.

> her!). And just as I thank my stars for so many things, so I thank you, dear Lucie, for all your help, your kindness, your courage, your warmth, your generosity, the example that you set us all.[68]

Britten also wrote earlier and glowingly of Pears's 'continental voice'. After a performance of *Grimes* in Basel in May 1946 he observed: 'Everyone marvels at Peter. He is obviously a continental rather than an English singer, judging by the terrific notices & receptions.'[69]

Pears's early performances, too, display a bias towards the Italian repertoire [Appendix V]. Between 1938 and 1951 he performed in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, *Rigoletto*, *La bohéme*, *Don Pasquale* and *La traviata*. Moreover, he maintained that Britten went to his performances to learn from Verdi and the wider Italian tradition: 'Ben came to almost every performance I gave, when he was free, because he was after all writing an opera and wanted to learn as much as he could about other people's operas, too.'[70] Britten even made a point of studying the score of *Rigoletto* at the time of Pears's performances. On 21 March 1948 he wrote: 'It is lovely to see you are enjoying *Rigoletto* – I bet it'll be good. I have been studying the score carefully, & have lots of ideas about it! I wonder if they agree with yours.'[71] Pertinently, Pears said of this time: 'It was all food for *Grimes*'.[72]

Apart from Pears, Britten worked with other singers who frequently performed Verdian roles, such as Joan Cross and Heather Harper. Moreover, in vocal performances in general, he appeared to favour the Italian style. Referring to Strauss' vocal writing Britten wrote to Erwin Stein from Basel on 24 May 1946:

> *Arabella* is a nightmare, but Strauss is extremely popular still here & so is still that appalling method of barking & yelling instead of singing, of no vocal line & of a perpetual lush elaboration in the orchestral pit ... The singers, most of whom have good voices, have no legato & no technique at all (that is why the Hut scene & Embroidery aria at Basel seem so awful).[73]

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[68] *Ibid.*, p. 193.
[69] Benjamin Britten to Erwin Stein 24 May 1948, BPL: Britten-Stein Correspondence.
[70] Christopher Headington, *Peter Pears: A Biography*, p. 124.
[71] Benjamin Britten, *Letters from a Life*, Vol. II, p. 1133.
[72] Christopher Headington, *Peter Pears: A Biography*, p. 125.
[73] BPL: Britten-Stein Correspondence.

Moreover, he was directly involved with other *bel canto* singers through Lord Harewood, a member of the board of directors at Covent Garden, editor of *Kobbé's Opera Book* and a self-confessed 'melomane'.[74] At one stage, in the late 1950s, Britten was even considered as music director for Covent Garden.[75] Harewood also recalls lending Britten a number of Verdi scores, including *I due Foscari*.[76] It was through Harewood that Britten heard Maria Callas in *La Gioconda* in August 1947 and in *Norma* in 1952, even beginning negotiations with her agent to enrol her as Elizabeth in a performance of *Gloriana* at *La Scala*. Harewood's life-long enthusiasm for Verdi and Italian opera thus joined up with Britten's.

4. 'Let us return to the past – that will be progress':[77] Verdi and Britten's early critics

Britten's contemporary critics were not slow in isolating Italianate gestures in many of his works, ranging from songs (the *Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo* in particular) to operas, the Church Parables and the *War Requiem*. Interestingly, these include works with 'covert' Italian allusions as well as the 'overtly' Italianate works such as *Matinées Musicales* and *Death in Venice.*

Somewhat surprisingly, *Paul Bunyan* was deemed by Colin Downes to be an eclectic stylistic amalgamation of allusions – including Italian ones – ranging 'everywhere from Prokofiev to Mascagni, from Rimsky-Korsakoff to Gilbert and Sullivan'.[78] The allusion to Mascagni identifies the roots of the *verismo* that flowered in Puccini. The *Michelangelo Sonnets*, however, perhaps due to their Italian texts, prompted more comments about the Italianate, ranging from Sackville-West's

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[74] The Earl of Harewood, *The Tongs and the Bones: The Memoirs of Lord Harewood*, London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson Ltd., 1981, p. 237.
[75] Britten declined the offer on 5 January 1959, writing to Harewood: 'I feel it must be private & unofficial - & <u>really</u> I don't think there would be any sense (or use) my attending meetings of the Opera Board ... As you know, I'm not a good talker, I've not enough general knowledge to play the operatic cricket XI game, & if help is needed to get over the operatic policy of the Garden, I can't see myself succeeding when you & David [Webster] feel you have failed.' BPL: Britten-Harewood Correspondence.
[76] Lord Harewood, *The Tongs and the Bones*, p. 144.
[77] *The Times*, 19 June 1964.
[78] Benjamin Britten, *Letters from a Life*, Vol. II, p. 915.

appreciation of their 'long, rhetorical Italian line[s]'[79] to Colin McPhee's description of them as 'pastiches that hold little interest'.[80] The works were both praised and condemned for their Italian gestures, and this duality set a precedent for subsequent comment.

Peter Grimes was frequently considered in Verdian terms. William Glock suggested that Verdi would have 'sat back in admiration'[81] at the performance. Desmond Shawe-Taylor considers the connections between the opening Borough Court scene and *Falstaff*: 'Different though the mood is, one thinks of the opening of Verdi's *Falstaff*, there is the same effect of speed and precision'.[82] And the structure of the work once more recalled 'Italian *verismo*'[83] for Virgil Thompson. Rather more negatively, Irving Kolodin noted that 'the realistic intent of Britten was ill-served by the oversized chorus, the static direction and stylized groupings which might well have been the seaside of Ponchielli's *La Gioconda*'.[84] Britten criticism of the time is thus coloured by the continuing disregard for Italian opera where recognised allusions to Verdi, or in this case Ponchielli, were often poisoned chalices.

It was not just the 'grand operas' that elicited 'Italian' descriptions, either. *The Rape of Lucretia*, for example, prompted identification with Puccini as well as Verdi. Ernest Newman noted that the *Flower Scene* reminded him of 'the famous scene between Madame Butterfly and Suzuki'[85] and Frank Howes asserted that 'in this opera Britten is carrying further his search for a new type of vocal line, new forms of vocal ensemble that will lift opera out of the dead end in which it has been stuck since the death of Puccini'.[86] It was Shawe-Taylor, however, who once again recognised Britten's Verdian nature: 'In spite of the slender resources, the effect is anything but small; here and there we are even reminded of Britten's enormous admiration of Verdi.'[87]

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[79] *Ibid.*, p. 1077. *New Statesman and Nation*, 3 October 1942.
[80] *Ibid.*, p. 1202. *Modern Music*, 21/1, November 1943, pp. 48-49.
[81] *Ibid.*, p. 1258. *Observer*, 10/24, June 1945.
[82] *Ibid.*, p. 1261. *New Statesman and Nation*, 16 June 1945.
[83] Benjamin Britten, *Letters from a Life*, Vol. III, p. 377.
[84] *Ibid.*, p. 379. *P. M.*, 15 February 1948.
[85] *Ibid.*, p. 217. *Sunday Times*, 21 July 1946.
[86] *Ibid.*, p. 219. *The Times*, 13 July 1946.
[87] *Ibid.*, p. 222. *The New Statesman and Nation*, 20 July 1946.

Falstaff was again invoked in Goldbeck's descriptions of *Albert Herring*:

> [H]ere we have the aesthetic of *Falstaff* and *L'heure espagnole*, a game of allusions and knowing winks. It requires a knowledgeable audience to pick up all the quotations ... an audience that knows Verdi and is familiar with the classical and romantic operatic repertoire in general, who will then be delighted by the allusions and references.[88]

According to this view, understanding of the Verdian backgrounds could enhance enjoyment of the work in performance and was even vital to a true appreciation of Britten's dramatic aims; his comedy in part derived from a play with known sources.

Colin Mason's appraisal of *The Turn of the Screw*, somewhat surprisingly, picks out its Verdian melody. He writes: 'As in Britten's earlier operas and as again in "Gloriana", his Verdian gift for devising vivid, memorable, and inexhaustibly varied accompaniments and figurations to adorn his simple melodic lines ....'.[89] The 'number' construction of the work is also observed in the *New York Herald Tribune*, and (more surprisingly) its allusions to Monteverdi suggested in *The Times*.

Britten's use of Verdian gestures for parody inevitably works its way into reviews of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Martin Cooper refers to the 'play within a play' as 'an amusing parody of Italian opera'.[90] Rather more critically, Shawe-Taylor observed the 'The Rustics, headed by Owen Brannigan's Verdian heroics as Pyramus, and Mr. Pears's quasi-Mad scene as a saffron-clad Thisbe were very funny, even though the actual music parodies are not subtle'.[91] Interestingly, Wagnerian elements were also highlighted, including, as Shawe-Taylor notes: 'the throbbing of *Tristan*-like repeated chords'[92] that accompany the lovers. (Indeed, Wagner parody is openly established in *Albert Herring* with the quotation of the 'love potion motif'.)

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[88] *Ibid.*, p. 309. *Le Figaro* 2 August 1947.
[89] *Manchester Guardian Weekly* 23 September 1954.
[90] *Daily Telegraph* 11 June 1960.
[91] Desmond Shawe-Taylor, *Sunday Times* 12 June 1960.
[92] *Ibid.*

In *Curlew River*, which was at one stage envisaged in a south Italian setting,[93] the critic for *The Times* is reminded that 'Verdi was not thinking in terms of dogged conservatism when he exhorted: "Let us return to the past – that will be progress"'.[94] He apparently recognised the manner in which Britten used Verdian elements to enrich his musical present.

Moreover, the depth of Verdian reference is highlighted in *Death in Venice* by Shawe-Taylor: 'There are brilliant Italian *vignettes*: the repeated quavers of the barber's professional patter interspersed with his ingratiating 3/4 phrases *à la* Tasti or Denza; the piazza scene with the café trio playing a "Tadzio theme"; the comic song and laughing-chorus of the strolling players.'[95] Generic as well as textural details are thus brought to the fore.

To cite this collection of critical observations is not to suggest that we should return to these early stand-points, but rather to map out a field of thought surrounding the Italian background to Britten's works. The elements that these critics observe – the melodic lines, operatic numbers, generic references, regard for the voice and so on – provide us with a starting point for the re-evaluation of Britten's use of the musical past.

Thus, Britten's words, the appraisals of his critics, his collections of scores and recordings and his knowledge and enthusiasm for *bel canto* performance, all point towards a profound relationship between Verdi's music and his own. It was an influence that began in the early 40s, peaked in the early 50s, and was then, as we shall see, taken into his music, gradually transforming and evolving thereafter. Britten looked South, travelling great aesthetic distances, to discover his very personal expression.

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[93] Britten wrote to William Plomer on 15 April 1959: 'But we might get a very strong atmosphere (which I personally love) if we set it in pre-conquest East Anglia (where there were shrines galore) – or in Israel, or South Italy. (We might even set it 'no-where', with 'the river', 'the village' etc. etc.).' BPL: Britten-Plomer correspondence archive.

[94] *The Times* 19 June 1964.

[95] *The Sunday Times* 24 June 1964.

5. Britten's 'Romantic' journey to Italy

In a BBC interview recorded in 1960, Britten described the reasons for his recent trip to Italy to work on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: 'I went to … Venice because it's a place that I love very dearly and [I] find work easy there … there's something curiously restful and yet stimulating in that beautiful city.'[96] For him, Venice was a place of creative promise as well as repose, and he travelled there on numerous occasions to write, to perform with Pears and to relax. In addition to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1960), his sojourns involved the completion of *Curlew River* (1964), *The Prodigal Son* (1968), the Third String Quartet (1975) and, perhaps most significantly, *Death in Venice* (1973).

Britten shared this passion for the South as a stimulus to creativity with a vast array of Romantic writers and many of the texts that he set to music and treasured in his personal library centralised Italian themes. Thus, in addition to the many and complex Italianate *musical* allusions that colour his oeuvre, literary allusions to the nation also abound. Moreover, Britten's letters from Italy and Pears's travel diaries frequently resonate with the images (and often 'mirages') of the country invented by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writers (notably Goethe, Byron, Platen, Shelley and Rolf), who travelled there as part of the traditional 'Grand Tour'[97] and who in turn drew on the work of Classical thinkers (Plato and Theocritus) and Renaissance artists (Michelangelo). These Romantic explorations of the Mediterranean created a fictional dichotomy between the North and the South: an exaggerated polarisation between Northern coldness, inhibition and reflection, and Southern warmth, spontaneity and freedom.[98] This resulted in a collective, multifaceted, and often highly idealised image of the country and its people, emphasising in particular its potential for illicit erotic delight. (Such myth-making resonates somewhat disturbingly with nineteenth-century notions of 'otherness' linked to the domination of exotic cultures as well as identification with them, a tension often manifest on the opera stage.) By interweaving Britten's personal and creative responses to Italy into

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[96] Benjamin Britten, *Britten on Music*, p. 191.
[97] Edorado Zuccato, *Coleridge in Italy*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1996, p. 6.
[98] *Ibid.*, p. 6; Tobias Jones, *The Dark Heart of Italy*, London, Faber, 2003.

those of his acknowledged literary predecessors it is possible to see the extent to which his ideas of the South were coloured by their own.

On Britten's first trip to Italy in March 1934 for the ICSM Festival in Florence, it was the scenery that immediately captured his imagination. On 30 March he wrote to his parents: 'The scenery from [Paris to Turin] ... was incredible. Snow everywhere – lakes, mountains galore, I have never seen anything like it. The light was superb – very sunny, with occasional clouds – and it made the colouring very brilliant.'[99] Talking of the journey from Genoa to Florence he continues: 'You see, the railway runs for about 100 miles right along the coast of the Mediterranean. When we saw the sea it was superb – lovely and still and blue, absolutely transparent.'[100] Enthusiastic references to the 'beautiful & excessively moving'[101] country abound in his later correspondence. For example, he wrote to Elizabeth Mayer from Venice on 7 February 1949: 'This is just a line of greeting from Italy, from the Mediterranean! ... Peter & I have had nearly three weeks of this heavenly country, & the beauty of it all... we drifted from galleries to churches, round the lagoon in boats, & can really say that we have got to know the town a bit – certainly caught its flavour.'[102]

The scenery and people of Italy were also central to Goethe's Italian experiences, as displayed in *The Flight to Italy* and *Italian Journey*, as well as the *Roman Elegies*, all held in Britten's and Pears's library collection. These studies of the Italian continent, its climate, culture and even weather, frequently oscillate between 'scientific' observation and passionate rapture: the 'cold-hot' clash of early Romanticism.[103] Further, the 'Grand Tour' on which Goethe embarked was, at the time, considered an essential part of the writer's training, for cultural enrichment and stimulation. In his writings a number of the prevailing, and often conflicting, themes of the 'fictionalised' South come to the fore. Not only is the Mediterranean presented as an 'idyllic' escape for the contemplation and creation of art amid scenic beauty, but its erotic potential is highlighted. The warm 'climate' of Italy also appears to refer to an emotional and decidedly sensual state of mind. As well as in his accounts of his

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[99] Benjamin Britten, *Letters from a Life*, Vol. I, p. 332.
[100] *Ibid.*, p. 332.
[101] Benjamin Britten, *Letters from a Life*, Vol. III, p. 358.
[102] *Ibid.*, p. 489.
[103] Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism*, London, Pimlico, 2000, p. 111.

travels to Naples and Sicily, 'the locus of sensuality, pleasure and sexuality',[104] this theme is displayed in Goethe's openly erotic *Roman Elegies*, where he even suggests that Rome itself is love, 'Amor's temple alone':

> Rome, you remain a whole world; but a world without love would not ever
> Truly amount to the world, neither would Rome still be Rome.[105]

That this love is sexual as well as spiritual is demonstrated later:

> We enjoy the delights of the genuine naked god, Amor,
> And our rock-a-bye bed's rhythmic, melodious creak.[106]

(Britten's acknowledgement of Italy's erotic potential, although evident as we shall see, is eminently more veiled and private.) However, the flip-side of this idealisation emerges too. Goethe returns again and again to the conflict between his 'Germanness' and the 'exoticism' of the Italian nation: travel abroad leads to a heightened awareness of his displacement and a longing for home.

Venice was a place of passion for Byron too, as demonstrated by his biography as well as his fiction. Fiona McCarthy refers to his 'sexual exhaustion'[107] after the Venetian Carnival season, a time of decadence and boundless pleasure-seeking. And in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Venice is itself personified as a woman, an object of desire. The feminine imagery is compounded by the link between watery landscapes and womb-like regression:

> I loved her from my boyhood – she to me
> Was as a fairy city of the ear,
> Rising like water-columns from the sea.[108]

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[104] Gretchen L. Hachmeister, *Italy in the German Literary Imagination: Goethe's Italian Journey and its Reception by Eichendorff, Platen and Heine*, Woodbridge, Boydell and Brewer, 2002, p. 37.
[105] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Roman Elegies and Other Poems and Epigrams*, trans. Michael Hamburger, London, Anvil Press, 1998, p. 45.
[106] *Ibid.*, p. 46.
[107] Fiona McCarthy, *Byron: Life and Legend*, London, Faber & Faber, 2002, p. 323. Robert Aldrich, *The Seduction of the Mediterranean: Writing, Art and Homosexual Fantasy*, London, Routledge, 1996, p. 70.
[108] Gretchen L. Hachmeister, *Italy in the German Literary Imagination*, p. 113.

Amorousness, however, descends into confusion; passion becomes Bacchic chaos in Byron's description of the carnival in *Beppo*.[109] The masquerade, a play of appearances and deceptions, represented 'liberation from conventions'[110] and also descent into a hedonistic whirl of desire. This emphasis on erotic possibility, where northern societal constraints are abandoned, is joined by an undercurrent of homoeroticism in his work. Indeed, this coupling of the South with often homoerotic sexual freedom is central to many of the 'inventions' of Italy that Britten admired.

Britten draws a 'private' connection between love, desire and the South in a tender letter to Pears dated 2 March 1949:

> Memories of the three weeks [in Venice] grow lovelier & lovelier – but unlike most memories they don't make me unhappy or nostalgic, only contented and looking forward. Lovely as Venice, Bellini, the little Carpaccio boys, Mimosa and the wine-dark sea off Portofino were, my happiest & most treasured memory is of the wonderful peace & contentment of your love and friendship. Love, such as I felt we had in those 3 weeks, is a rare thing – as beautiful and luminous as the sea outside, & with endless depths too. Thank you, my dearest.[111]

However, Britten steers well clear of recognising such sensual excess in his 'public' utterances. Thus, in his appreciation of Byron's poetry, shared by Pears, he was perhaps able to play out safely the desires that he otherwise concealed.

Britten's journeys to Venice towards the end of his life, while completing the Third String Quartet, suggest the 'darker side' of Italy emphasised by the Romantics: the illness, death and decay that counterbalance rapture and desire. It is this more treacherous and ambiguous side of Venice that Platen (with typical Classical restraint) describes in his *Venetian Sonnets*. Venice is thus characterised by its mixture of eroticism and danger, simultaneously a paradise and a hell. Like the sense of painful 'otherness' highlighted by Goethe, the South is presented as a place that offered pain and loss as well as boundless possibility.

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[109] Tony Tanner, *Venice Desired*, Cambridge Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1992, pp. 40-42.
[110] *Ibid.*, p. 41.
[111] Benjamin Britten, *Letters from a Life*, Vol. III, p. 491.

Britten also appreciated Venetian art and architecture, as underlined by his interest in the travel writings and art criticism of Bernard Berenson. This admiration resonates with Shelley's enthusiasm for Italy's classical heritage. Indeed, Shelley appeared to value nature and the ancient history of Italy above contemporary humanity, lamenting nostalgically for a lost Italy.[112] In *Prometheus Unbound*, *Epipsychidion*, *Adonais* and the *Triumph of Life*, he not only considers the cultural inheritance from antiquity – he is idealistic whereas Byron is pessimistic[113] – but also draws on the poetic principles of Dante and Petrarch. Plato (another representative of 'the South') is also an important influence.[114] There was an operatic connection, too. Shelley particularly admired Rossini's *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* and his regard for opera is tangible in the structures of *Prometheus Unbound*, which reflect aria and recitative forms.[115] We may conjecture, therefore, that Britten was attracted to Shelley's poetry, in part, due to its inherent 'musicality'. He read Shelley frequently, calling him a 'real great poet'[116] and set 'On a poet's lips I slept' from *Prometheus Unbound* as part of his *Nocturne* (1958).

On 4 February 1949, Britten wrote to Ronald Duncan that 'Venice [has] done the trick, spiritually & physically for me I think – what with all this beauty, food & sun.'[117] As John Pemble suggests, trips to Italy had long been considered of medicinal value, and it was a similar impulse that frequently lead Britten there to recuperate.[118] Keats too, spent his last year in Venice, at the invitation of Shelley, on account of his tuberculosis.[119] And he, like Shelley and Byron, was fascinated by the sensuousness of the South.[120] It may well have been his concentration on the tactile night and dream-like reverie that prompted Britten to use his poems in *Serenade* ('To Sleep', 1943) and *Nocturne* ('Sleep and Poetry', 1958). Moreover, Keats was passionate

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[112] Alan M. Weinberg, *Shelley's Italian Experience*, London, Macmillan, 1991, p. 13.
[113] *Ibid.*, p. 14.
[114] Ross G. Woodman, 'Shelley's Changing Attitude to Plato', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 21, No. 4, 1960, p. 540.
[115] *Ibid.*, p. 156.
[116] 'Read lots of poetry (Shelley, Eliot, Auden & Spencer) & Also music (principally Mahler).' (Thursday 28 January 1937) Benjamin Britten, *Letters from a Life*, Vol. I, p. 473. Letter to Wulff Scherchen 3 October 1938: 'Have you ever thought of writing any serious (not beachcomber!) poetry? You have a great knowledge of language – you love our really great poets (Shelley & Keats etc.) - & I think you've got great observation. Why not try?' *Ibid.*, p. 589.
[117] Benjamin Britten, *Letters from a Life*, Vol. III, p. 488.
[118] John Pemble, *The Mediterranean Passion: Victorians in the South*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1987, p. 84.
[119] Cedric Watts, *A Preface to Keats*, London, Longman, 1985, p. 54.
[120] *Ibid.*, p. 26.

about the mythology of ancient Greece (as displayed in 'On seeing the Elgin Marbles', 'Ode to a Grecian Urn' and *Endymion*, itself based on the Greek legend of the shepherd loved by a moon-goddess).[121] Not only did he revel in mythology as a creative device, but he took Plato's conception of 'creative madness' from *Phaedrus* as an apt description of his own creativity.

Another important aspect of Britten's experiences in Italy was the religion. In May 1972, Britten and Pears visited San Fortunato and were immediately struck by the spectacle of the town's 'Sagra Patronale', as demonstrated by Pears's detailed diary description:

> In the Piazza the procession was waiting to form up and get moving, waiting for the saint. Standing in the centre in four separate groups, respectfully regarded by all, young men surrounded four great processional crucifixes, 12 feet high or more; two Christs were black, two were what we call white; adorned with silver plaques, at head, feet and arms, and with bunches of red roses, they were not ignoble works ... At length the saint appeared on his tray, brilliantly lit by forty electric candles ... Rosy and glowing, the picture of military fitness, he knelt on his puffy clouds supported by the two bambini with the sword ... looking confidently towards heaven in the same comfortable posture.[122]

Religiosity mingles with sensuous delight, here, fuelled by candles, art works and the beautiful limbs of young boys.

For Frederick Rolfe (Baron Corvo), too, the experience of Italy[123] was, in part, one of religious exploration, and Pears was an avid reader of his works in the 1940s.[124] Rolfe attempted to become ordained many times, and *The Desire and Pursuit of the Whole* (based on Plato's theory of love expounded in *Symposium*)[125] is a semi-autobiographical account of the tension between religion and sexual fulfilment. The book is also about Corvo's homoeroticism[126] and the sensuality of the

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[121] *Ibid.*, p. 31.
[122] Peter Pears, *The Travel Diaries of Peter Pears: 1936-1978*, ed. Philip Reed, Woodbridge, Boydell Press, 1995, p. 179.
[123] A. J. A. Symonds, *The Quest for Corvo: An Experiment in Biography*, London, Quartet Books, 1993, p. 207.
[124] Christopher Headington, *Peter Pears: A* Biography, p. 43.
[125] Frederick Rolfe (Baron Corvo), *The Desire and Pursuit of the Whole*, ed. Andrew Eburne, London, Gibson Square Books, 2002, p. 23.
[126] A. J. A. Symonds, *The Quest for Corvo*, p. 233.

city of Venice itself. There is thus a tension between the hero's worldly desires and his otherworldly aspirations to the priesthood. The Classical is thus strongly associated with homoeroticism.

Homoeroticism itself is explored in Britten's setting of the *Michelangelo Sonnets* (1940), dedicated to Pears. As Britten wrote to Enid Slater on 7 April 1940:

> I've got a sudden craze for the Michel Angelo sonnets & have set about half a dozen of them (in Italian – pretty brave, but there are people here who speak good Italian, & after Rimbaud in French I feel that I can attack anything! I've got my eye on Rilke now & Hölderlin).[127]

The poems, many of them addressed to a male love, are, in context, the most explicit statement of Britten's sexuality. Not only do many of them focus on the figure of Ganymede – a key symbol of male-male love as Saslow has shown[128] – but they were also directed towards a male lover – Tomasso Cavalieri, who was a painted subject.[129]

The connection between homoeroticism and Classical beauty is openly explored by Arthur Symonds, himself a homosexual visitor to Venice, in his studies and defences of homoerotic love. He characterises physical beauty as 'a direct beam sent from the eternal source of all reality, in order to elevate the lover's soul and lead him on the upward path toward heaven';[130] this Platonic imagery leads him to observe that 'the love of women is unworthy of a soul bent upon high thoughts and virile actions'.[131] In 'A Problem in Greek Ethics' Symonds goes on to defend heroic friendship using precedents from classical literature, Plato's *Symposium* in particular.[132] Indeed, allusion to Classicism (Greek as well as Italian) frequently became a 'secret sign' of homoeroticism, and the *Symposium* became its most potent symbol. Aldrich notes that 'the classical "model" of "homosexuality" (or, more properly, pederasty) formed the central argument in apologias for homosexuality, and

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[127] Benjamin Britten, *Letters from a Life*, Vol. II, p. 801.
[128] James S. Saslow, *Ganymede in the Renaissance: Homosexuality in Art and Society*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1986, p. 1.
[129] John Addington Symonds, *The Life of Michelangelo Buonarrotti*, London, John C. Nimmo, 1903, Vol. I, p. 125.
[130] *Ibid.*, p. 170.
[131] *Ibid.*, p. 161.
[132] John Addington Symonds, *A Problem in Greek Ethics: An Enquiry into the Phenomenon of Sexual Inversion*, Privately Printed for the ΑΡΕΟΠ Α ΓΙΤΙΓ Α Society, 1901.

the classical statue provided that archetype for male beauty and "homosexual" aesthetics.'[133] The depth of Britten's debt to Classicism emerges, too, in his works: notably, *The Rape of Lucretia* (1946), *Young Apollo* (1939), *Six Metamorphoses after Ovid* (1951) and *Phaedra* (1975).

Yet Britten's attitude to Classicism was, in general, far from an overt statement of his sexuality. Indeed, it is likely that his disagreements with E. M. Forster during the creation of *Billy Budd* stemmed in part from his wish to conceal, or at least limit, the homoerotic aspects of the narrative – to keep his sexuality 'in the closet'. A private expression of the erotic with reference to Classical literature is revealed, however, when Britten refers to himself as Hylas and Pears as Hercules in a touching letter:

> I find Theocritus, even in these ghastly translations, very moving. Au revoir my Hercules – I nearly signed myself Hylas, but at nearly 30 that's a little exaggerated![134]

In addition, Classical mythology was for Britten a means of reclaiming a creative space at once 'archaic', enduring and escapist. Thecoritus' *Idylls* and their visions of the pastoral captured his imagination. Theocritus' musical imagery is multifarious and in the first *Idyll*, the shepherd serenades his goatherd friend with music of the panpipes. It is perhaps no wonder, then, that Britten liked the poems to be *read to* him by Marjorie Fass.[135]

When Britten travelled 'South' he thus joined a large company of literary artists who had been drawn on the same journey. The layers of association that are articulated in these evocations of the fictional Mediterranean colour his personal experiences of Italy, his reading and his choice of song texts. The Romantic 'image' of the Italian South that emerges is multifarious, fractured and idealised, yet central themes are discernible: scenic beauty, warmth, creativity, sexual freedom, Classical beauty, homoeroticism, mythology, religiosity, spirituality, illness, decay, and death.

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[133] Robert Alderich, *The Seduction of the Mediterranean: Writing, Art and Homosexual Fantasy*, London, Routledge, 1993, p. x.
[134] Benjamin Britten, *Letters from a Life*, Vol. II, p. 1166.
[135] *Ibid.*, p. 19.

6. Britten and his collaborators travelling 'South'

Britten's more immediate literary circle (W. H. Auden, E. M. Forster and William Plomer in particular), all of whom spent time living in Italy and Greece, absorbed and challenged this Romantic vision of the Mediterranean, and their emulation and criticisms of the Italian 'fantasy' appear to condition Britten's personal relationship with the Italianate as well as his dramatic concerns. This fascination with the South is reflected in Britten's association with the critic Edward Sackville-West and his decision to set works by Henry James and Thomas Mann, all of whom had strong biographical and literary links with Italy. Moreover, for Britten and his collaborators, Italy became a 'secret' symbol of homoeroticism in their gay sub-culture, a fictional *Idyll* that allowed for an escape from the repressive social constraints of their time.

From their first meeting in the 1930s, Britten was dazzled by W. H. Auden's intellectualism and quickly adopted him as his 'literary mentor'.[136] Auden was an influence in Britten's and Pears's decision to go to the USA in 1939, and once there with the Mayer family it was he who introduced Britten to the *Michelangelo Sonnets*. Both he and Elizabeth Mayer were Italian speakers and their knowledge may well have fuelled Britten's enthusiasm for the verses. The implicit homoeroticism of the poems would surely not have been lost on Auden. Further, he was notoriously bohemian, and his house at 7 Middagh Street, New York (where they stayed for a time) was a refuge for many homosexual artists.[137] It is significant, however, that Britten found the atmosphere and conditions of the house too 'radical' for his liking, and their stay was only a short one.

As well as recommending the *Michelangelo Sonnets*, Auden frequently wrote texts for Britten: these included the *Cabaret Songs*, 'To Lie flat on the Back' and *Hymn to St Cecilia*. They also collaborated on Britten's first opera *Paul Bunyan*. Although these works do not have explicit references to Italy or the South, the songs do underline the homoerotic sensuousness of Auden's approach, tempered with cold objectivity. This hot-cold tension is reminiscent of Goethe's 'detached

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[136] Benjamin Britten, *Letters from a Life*, Vol. I, p. 378.
[137] Sherill Tippins, *February House*, London, Pocket Books, 2005.

sentimentalism',[138] and Auden was to translate Goethe's *Italian Journey* with Elizabeth Mayer in 1942. He even declared his ambition of becoming a 'Minor Atlantic Goethe' in his poetry.[139]

The subsequent rift and continuing uneasiness between Britten and Auden after 1940 has been well documented, though Britten continued to collect his poetry for much of the rest of his life and wrote enthusiastically about the later volumes.[140] Thus, Britten was apparently aware of, and admiring of, Auden's 'Italian phase', borne of his frequent trips to Italy in the 1940s and 50s. Auden considered that poetry 'like a river "flows South"'[141] and the Italian poems of this time, including 'Ischia', 'In Praise of Limestone', 'Bucolics', 'The Shield of Achilles' and 'Good-bye to the *Mezzogiorno*' clearly illustrate this flow.

While Britten worked with Auden at the GPO film unit he met and worked with a number of writers who travelled to Italy for artistic and sensual stimulation, including Christopher Isherwood and Steven Spender. Moreover, Britten's poetry collection reveals that he was drawn to the work of Louis MacNeice and the writings of Somerset Maugham, both of whom drew a link between the South and sexual licence, specifically the possibility of homoerotic expression.

A central figure in this literary confluence of homosexuality, Italy and Classical Antiquity was E. M. Forster. Many of his novels and stories are set in Italy – notably, *A Room with a View*, *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, and the short story *Arctic Summer* – and in addition to descriptions of Italian sensuality and physical beauty he includes many veiled references to homoeroticism. Classical references also abound. Behind this imagery stands that of Edward Carpenter and Lowes Dickinson[142] who compounded the link between Classical beauty and homoeroticism by building on the work of Symonds. Forster's 'The Story of Panic' for example, concerns an English boy's rape by the god Pan, which leads to frenzied reverie and his yearning for a

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[138] Paola Marchetti, 'Auden's Landscapes', *The Cambridge Companion to W. H. Auden*, p. 210.
[139] Humphrey Carpenter, *W. H. Auden: A Biography*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1981, p. 394.
[140] Donald Mitchell, *Britten and Auden in the Thirties: The Year 1936,* Woodbridge, Boydell Press, 2000, p. 15.
[141] Nicholas Jenkins, 'Auden in America', *The Cambridge Companion to W. H. Auden*, p. 43.
[142] Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, *The Greek View of Life*, London, Methuen, 1932, p. 185.

young Italian boy.[143] The coming together of a missionary and a local chief in 'The Life to Come' is also a striking clash of eroticism and religiosity, reminiscent of the heady sacred-profane mixture explored by Corvo.

For Forster, Italy allowed above all for the possibility of social comment and satire. Tourists are frequently presented as closed-minded, 'culture-seekers' tied to their travel guides. Nowhere is this more apparent than in *A Room with a View* where he explores how the negative attributes of England are transported abroad – it is away from home that customary actions are allowed to stand out in stark relief. Moreover, it is against these restrictive social codes that the freedom and spontaneity of the Italians is revealed.

It was the *musicality* of Forster's works that prompted Britten to write an article about his work in 1960. Britten suggests: 'There is no doubt that E. M. Forster is our most musical novelist'.[144] He goes on to propose that the works themselves reveal 'operatic' organisation:

> Here one may perhaps observe that the construction of Forster's novels often resembles that of the 'classical' opera (Mozart – Weber – Verdi) where recitatives, the deliberately un-lyrical passages by which the action is advanced, separate arias or ensembles (big, self-contained set pieces of high comedy or great emotional tension). As examples of the latter, think of the bathing episode in *A Room With a View*, the second school Sunday dinner at which Ansell confronts Rickie in *The Longest Journey*, and perhaps greatest of all, the trial in *A Passage to India*.[145]

This is not only interesting as literary description, but it tells us about Britten's frame of reference:[146] he saw in Forster's writings something Italian.

However, it appears to have been Forster's account of the performance of Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* in *Where Angels Fear to Tread* that moved Britten most. In a revealing account of his affection for the passage he writes:

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[143] James Michael Buzard, 'Forster's Trespasses: Tourism and Cultural Politics', *Twentieth-Century Literature*, Vol. 34, No. 2, 1988, p. 161.
[144] Benjamin Britten, 'Some Notes on Forster and Music' (1969), *Britten on Music*, p. 316.
[145] *Ibid.*, p. 317.
[146] Michelle Fillion, 'Edwardian Perspectives on Nineteenth-century Music in E. M. Forster's "A Room with a View", *Nineteenth-Century Music*, Vol. 25, No. 2-3, 2001-2, pp. 266-295.

The scene, *Lucia di Lammermoor* at the Monteriano Opera House, is long and gloriously funny: the fat lady of the railway journey 'who had never, never before ...' turning up as the prima donna; Harriet trying to stop an Italian audience from talking, and trying to follow the plot; the triumph of the Mad Scene with the clothes-horse of flowers; and the cries of 'Let the divine creature continue'. But as always with Forster (as with Mozart too), under the comedy lies seriousness, passion and warmth: the warmth of the Italians loving their tunes, being relaxed and gay together, and not being afraid of showing their feeling – not 'pretending' like Sawston.[147]

Britten praises the scene for its mixture of comedy and seriousness, the social comment and the picture of Italian 'warmth'; and is seemingly sensitive too to its homoeroticism. This scene was based on Forster's actual experiences of a performance in 1903 that he attended with Edward Dent[148] and the sexual undertones of the passage are compounded by its allusions to a parallel scene in *Madam Bovary*. It affords a rare glimpse of Britten's appreciation of homoeroticism in art.

It was the incorporation of such overt homosexual 'messages', as well as the stormy working relationship with Forster, that may well have contributed to Britten's search for a new librettist after *Billy Budd* (1951). And it was to William Plomer that he turned. Plomer was a more 'discreet' homosexual although he, too, linked the South (primarily the Greek South) with homoeroticism. Their first collaboration – *Gloriana* – based on Strachey's 'Elizabeth and Essex' does not deal with homoerotic themes, however, Elizabeth is described as possessing 'masculine' beauty.[149]

Britten's library contained a considerable array of Plomer's poetry and short stories. The collection *Four Countries* is particularly pertinent. 'Local Colour', for example, charts the travels of two young English boys and their encounter with beautiful Greek youths in a restaurant. Plomer describes the potential of travel:

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[147] Benjamin Britten, *Britten on Music*, p. 317.
[148] Oliver Stallybrass, 'Introduction', E. M. Forster, *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, London, Penguin, 2001, p. 10.
[149] Lytton Strachey, *Elizabeth and Essex: A Tragic History*, London, Chatto and Windus, 1932, p. 28 quoted in: Claire Seymour, *The Operas of Benjamin Britten: Expression and Evasion*, Woodbridge, Boydell & Brewer, 2004, p. 169.

> When Nordic, young, enterprising and healthy, first finds himself enjoying freedom, warmth and glamour, the effect on him is indescribably delightful. He is without responsibilities, he has a susceptible body and an impressionable mind; the sun warms his skin and the blood sings in his veins. Life is full of promise, he is ready for anything.[150]

The 'impressions' that these boys are free to receive are openly erotic. As one might expect, his poetry also betrays an affinity for Classical mythology. Works such as 'Archaic', 'Apollo', and 'The Sonnets' praise the landscapes of the South and liken Southern physical beauty to ancient sculpture.[151] Moreover, Britten and Plomer proposed many subjects based on Classical ideas, such as 'Phaeton' and 'Arion and Icarus'.[152]

Edward Sackville-West, who had written an early account of *Peter Grimes*, was another who directed Britten's reading, particularly after the latter's 'separation' from Auden. His collections, including *And so to Bed* based on a BBC radio programme contain many poems with Italian subjects that Britten admired.[153] In *Inclinations*, too, he analyses the emotional attachments of writers to the South.[154] These literary preferences may well have informed Britten's own. Moreover, Sackville-West recognised the Italianate in Britten's music, most strikingly by tracing the operatic resonances in the *Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo* (1942):

> It was high time the long, sinuous, rhetorical Italian line reappeared in English vocal music ... One could take a phrase from one of these sonnets and refer it to Puccini; but the point really is that that phrase is an echo of another in *Falstaff*, and that one again an echo of still another in, say, *L'Incoronazione di Poppea*.[155]

For his operas Britten turned to two other 'Italianate' writers: Henry James (*The Turn of the Screw* and *Owen Wingrave*) and Thomas Mann (*Death in Venice*). Both had strong links with Italy, and both dealt with homoerotic subjects in their writings.

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[150] William Plomer, *Four Countries*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1949, p. 247.
[151] 'Dredged in a net the slender god/ Lies on deck and dries in the sun,/ His head set proudly on his neck,/ Like a runner whose race is won.../ He is as he was, inert, alert,/ The one hand open, the other lightly shut,/ His nostrils clean as holes in a flute,/ The nipples and navel delicately cut.' William Plomer, *Selected Poems*, London, Hogarth Press, 1940, p. 32.
[152] Benjamin Britten, *Letters from a Life*, Vol. III, p. 299.
[153] *Ibid.*, p. 350.
[154] Edward Sackville-West, *Inclinations*, London, Secker & Warburg, 1949, p. 143.
[155] Benjamin Britten, *Letters from a Life*, Vol. II, p. 1077.

Henry James, who visited Italy repeatedly after his first trip there in 1869, dealt extensively with the idea of the 'journey South' in his short stories, novels and travel guides to Venice, Florence, Rome and Naples. Like his eighteenth- and nineteenth-century forebears, he was excited by the natural beauty of the landscape and the aesthetic beauty of the art. Soon after his first visit he wrote: 'Italy is so much the most beautiful country in the world ... the incomparable *fusion*, fusion of human history and mortal passion with the elements of earth and air, of colour, composition and form.'[156] *Travelling Companions*, *Portrait of a Lady*, *The Princess Casamassima*, *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Golden Bowl*, among others, all feature Italy, presenting it alternately as a place of promise, sexual freedom and danger.

Tellingly, James also recognised his affinity with John Addington Symonds: they shared a passion for the South as well as an enthusiasm for narratives imbued with homoeroticism. Italy was a place where these fantasies could be safely played out. Yet, his delight in Italy is tempered by awareness of the potential dangers of Italian sensuality and the fragility of beauty.[157] He recognised not only the romanticism of the country, but also its treachery and carnality.[158] By dwelling on the 'theatricality' of Venice, for example, and its potential for social comedy (*opera buffa* entertainment), he points to the illicit dangers of the knowingly misleading city and the sinister deceptions of Italians themselves. Recognising the city's 'inexorable decay'[159] he compares its past grandeur with its present ruin, both actual and moral. Not only does he feel alienated from the Southern lifestyle, but he also highlights the tension between past and present, dreams and reality: a painful and irreconcilable fissure.[160]

James's awareness of the dark undercurrents that lurk beneath the surface of Venice inevitably leads him to see the city as a place of death. Both *The Wings of the Dove* and the *Aspern Papers* concern death eagerly awaited by their main protagonists. James's Venice was a place of pain, inhumanity and demise. It is this kind of horror, his descent into nightmarish delusions that is explored in *The Turn of*

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[156] *Ibid.*
[157] Carl Maves, *Sensuous Pessimism: Italy in the Work of Henry James*, p. 5.
[158] *Ibid.*, p. 7.
[159] *Ibid.*, p. 4
[160] Ibid., p. 4. John Pemble, *The Mediterranean Passion.*

the Screw (1955). Britten was clearly drawn to James' depictions of the melancholy and the corrupt, which are, in context, made all the more poignant by the direct confrontation between 'innocence' and 'experience'. Thus, although the opera is not overtly 'Italian', it does embody the affects associated with James' malignant South: the paradise infested by serpents.

What is covert in *The Turn of the Screw* is overt in *Death in Venice*. Like James, Thomas Mann was drawn repeatedly to Italy and Venice in particular. He described his yearnings (*Sehnsucht*) for the country as the symptoms of 'insufficiency in [himself], the need for contemplation and deliverance through the completely other, the South, the brightness, clarity and lightness, the gift of the beautiful'.[161] However, he also felt the sharp conflict between the reasoned intellectualism of the North and the irrational sensuality of the South. And it is this polarity between Apollonian beauty and Bacchic excess that is played out so powerfully in *Death in Venice*. Indeed, the novella, as well as Britten's operatic realisation of it, highlights an array of the dialectical responses that the South may provoke – detachment versus emotional immediacy, pure affection versus carnal lust, inhibition versus freedom, creative posterity versus fleeting experience, socially imposed repression versus homoerotic passion – and acts as a metaphor for the affecting dramatic tensions that lace Britten's operatic output as a whole. The destructive potential of the South is a necessary counterbalance to its joyful promise.

7. Britten, Verdi and Italy

The literary themes uncovered here – a heady mixture of Classical beauty, homoeroticism, exoticism, sensuality, death, decay and excess – resonate overtly and covertly with the dramatic themes of Britten's operas. They emerge most obviously in *The Turn of the Screw* and *Death in Venice* but also, as more veiled references, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, through the cross-dressing of the Mechanicals in the comic Italian opera-within-opera, and in *Billy Budd*, through hints at Billy's 'Classical beauty'.

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[161] Ilsedore B. Jonas, *Thomas Mann and Italy*, trans. Betty Crouse, Alabama, The University of Alabama Press, 1979, p. i.

These 'Southern' dramatic themes emerge together with Britten's allusions to Verdi's *music*. Indeed, as we shall see in the analysis to follow, invocation and transformation of Verdian generic traits abounds, including the aspects that Britten isolated in his writings and interviews: primacy of melody, subtlety of harmonisation, balance of voice and orchestra, colourful orchestration and 'number' structures. (Indeed, these qualities form the basis of Kimbell's analysis of Verdi's generic finger-print.)[162] We may conjecture, then, that Verdi's music became for Britten *symbolic* of Italy, a vital part of his wider fascination with the country and the art based on it. Yet, there is a sharp conflict between the literary and dramatic associations of the South mapped above and Verdi's dramatic aims. And the issue is complicated still further by the contemporary resonance of the often politicised and mythologized figure of Verdi himself.

Indeed, Verdi's music is virtually inextricable from ideas of national identity and politics.[163] According to Philip Gossett, it was due in part to his rousing choruses that 'a people found its voice'.[164] The *Risorgimento* movement was famously supported by Verdi, and his works were readily 'decoded' as allegorical political narratives. Furthermore, his operatic choruses have become patriotic hymns in their own right, most famously 'Va, pensiero' (the chorus of the Hebrew Slaves) from *Nabucco*. Other highly-charged political works include *La battaglia di Legnano*, *Simon Boccanegra* (especially the 1881 revision of the council scene), *Don Carlo* and *Aïda*. There is suggestion, too, that as well as reacting to the political situation, Verdi was striving to shape it.[165] That his operas are of continuing political significance is suggested by the fact that during a performance of *Don Carlo* in Verona Arena in 1969, the audience joined in with 'Spuntato ecco il dì d'esultanza', during the *auto-da-fé* scene.[166] Verdi contributed to a strengthening of national pride, as Parakilas argues: 'Before the word "nationalism" even became part of political discourse, opera began presenting images

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[162] David Kimbell, *Italian Opera*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp. 430-436.
[163] 'Italian grand opera, the name of Verdi, and Italian nationalism are virtually synonymous.' Richard Dellamora and Daniel Fischlin, 'Introduction', *The Work of Opera: Genre, Nationhood, and Sexual Difference*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1997, p. 1.
[164] Philip Gossett, 'Becoming a Citizen: The Chorus in *Risorgimento* Opera', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1990, p. 41.
[165] James Parakilas, 'Political Representation and the Chorus in Nineteenth-Century Opera', *Nineteenth-Century Music*, Vol. 16, No. 2, 1992, p. 187.
[166] *Ibid.*, p. 181.

that defined nations from the bottom up, defined them by the rootedness of a people in their land.'[167]

Furthermore, the subjects of Verdi's dramas frequently focus on the more intimate social politics of family and honour. The wider concern with sweeping national narratives is coupled with an intense interest in the private world of familiar relationships, amorous triangulations and thwarted love. In particular, the relationship between fathers and children are central to his project, and in order to articulate these conflicts, characters in his operas, particularly the early works, frequently allude to melodramatic types, reinforced by vocal casting.[168] Further, he repeatedly explores the tensions between these patriarchal structures, with their strict honour codes, and the more liberal ideals of his democratic political convictions.[169]

While Britten too communicated 'political' ideals – particularly relating to pacifism and societal exclusion – they are far more subtle. Moreover, even his most 'public' works engage in complex ways with ideas of 'national' identity (a subject discussed in relation to *Gloriana* in chapter six). His dramatic preoccupations, too, were very different – although the 'love triangle' played out between Vere, Billy and Claggart in *Billy Budd* provides a homoerotic twist on a very Verdian theme. He famously returned again and again to the plight of the marginalised, the clash of innocence versus experience and psychological dilemmas concerning duty and desire. There are deep associations with Verdi but few specifics.

Thus, Britten uses Verdian *musical* elements to his very individual dramatic ends. The question of whether the dramatic and political associations of Verdi's music remain when the allusions are 'embedded' in a new context is a fraught one. I argue, here, that it is when the Italianate allusions are most self-conscious that these associations are brought knowingly into the frame, particularly in the parody of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. However, when the allusions are more subtly 'assimilated' and transformed, most evidently in *Billy Budd*, they become 'part' of

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[167] *Ibid.*, p. 190.
[168] Gilles de Van, *Verdi's Theatre: Creating Drama Through Music*, trans. Gilda Roberts, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1998, pp. 88-145.
[169] David A. J. Richards, *Tragic Manhood and Democracy: Verdi's Voice and the Powers of Musical Art*, Brighton, Sussex University Press, 2004, p. 37.

Britten's language to the point that they become lost altogether. We are thus left with a constantly shifting and teasing relationship between Britten's 'literary' conception of the South and his allusions to Verdian musical utterance.

Chapter II

Storms, Laughter and Madness:
Generic Allusions and 'Number' Structures in *Peter Grimes*

Just before the close of the final act of *Peter Grimes* Peter is left alone in his hut wailing in hallucinatory horror, his rejection from the Borough community underlined by the cries of the persecutory off-stage chorus calling his name, convinced of his guilt in relation to the death of his latest boy apprentice. In a 'mad scene' of chilling intensity, Peter re-lives the music that accompanied his downfall. His fevered, fragmented recitative thematically recalls his visionary hopes, the inquest, Ellen's affection (the agent of his failed salvation) and the vindictive, prejudicial voices of the seafaring society. Suicide is, apparently, the only option; a fate made more poignant by the obliviousness of the villagers who return apparently unchanged to their daily routine as the curtain falls.

Writing about the libretto of *Peter Grimes* in 1945, Desmond Shawe-Taylor suggests that it was such 'generic' scenes as the 'mad scene' that drew Britten to George Crabbe's poem as possible operatic material. He praises the libretto's

> rapid and dramatic action, full of atmosphere, of vivid country characters, and of genre pictures of a kind ideally suited to musical treatment. There is a pub scene with the storm growling outside and bursting in whenever the door is opened; a sunny Sunday morning on the beach with matins drifting through the open church door as a background to dialogue; a dance at the Moot Hall, with an unseen band.[1]

That Britten, too, considered these scenes as significant structural and musical elements is underlined by the fact that the early draft scenarios of the work include generic titles for many of these sections.

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[1] Desmond Shawe-Taylor, '*Peter Grimes*: A Review of the First Performance', *Benjamin Britten: Peter Grimes*, ed. Philip Brett, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983, p. 154

Peter Grimes is also notable for its number opera construction. Britten himself famously suggested that he had adopted the 'practice of separate numbers'[2] in the work and many commentators have seen this allusion to nineteenth-century and earlier practice as a problematic and even conservative element in the score.[3] Further, these number opera conventions – the division of scenes into discreet dramatic units, often marked by clear scene-changes and set-piece forms (arias, ensembles and choruses) – and generic scenes – stock scenes employed to set the mood or articulate dramatic action, for example storm scenes, dance scenes and mad scenes – also resonate with specifically Italianate and Verdian models.[4] (A detailed consideration of the allusions to Verdian set-piece construction follows in chapter four in relation to *Billy Budd*.) Yet, though Britten's handling of numbers and generic scenes resonate with Italian practice, the work often reveals more about Britten's *innovations* than his reliance on tradition.

This exploration of *Peter Grimes* will move from consideration of the genesis of the libretto and the generic and number opera resonances in the large-scale planning of the work, to analysis of a collection of Britten's generic scenes placed alongside possible models taken primarily from Verdi's *Macbeth*, *Rigoletto*, *La traviata*, *Aïda* and *Otello*: storm scene (act I scenes i and ii), *intermezzi* (Sea Interludes), church scene (act II scene i), Ellen's 'lament' (act III scene i), *brindisi* (act I scene ii), dance scene (act III scene i), laughing chorus (act II scene i and act III scene i) and mad scene (act III scene ii).

1. A 'number' libretto and large-scale structure

Britten famously observed in the introductory booklet to *Peter Grimes*' first performance at Sadler's Wells in 1945 that he was 'especially interested in the general architectural and formal problems of opera, and decided to reject the Wagnerian theory of "permanent melody" for the classical practice of separate numbers that

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[2] Benjamin Britten, 'Peter Grimes' (1945), *Britten on Music*, p. 50.
[3] Michael Kennedy, *Master Musicians: Britten*, ed. Stanley Sadie, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 159. Donald Mitchell, 'Peter Grimes: Fifty Years On', *The Making of Peter Grimes*, ed. Paul Banks, Bury St Edmunds, Bury St Edmunds Press, 2000, p. 151.
[4] Scott L. Balthazar, 'The Forms of Set Pieces', *The Cambridge Companion to Verdi*, pp. 49-68.

crystallize and hold the emotion of a dramatic situation at chosen moments'.[5] More specifically, it seems that Britten embraced the idea of *Verdian* 'number' structures in his works for similar reasons. As discussed above, he observed in 1966: 'I was particularly influenced by the sectional division of the operas which Verdi used all his life – working on different dramatic layers rather than the one slope up and down that other composers have used.'[6]

Britten's working practices suggest that operatic form was a pivotal element in the early stages of libretto writing. Eric Crozier recalls:

> All I knew of him suggested that he thought first of each new composition in terms of forms, that these notions of form generally became clearer in his mind, and that it was prolonged consideration of the formal units and relationships among them that finally gave rise to the melodies and harmonies that would express them most vividly.[7]

Similarly, Montagu Slater recounts that the libretto was constructed with 'numbers', and what Britten intriguingly called 'half numbers', very much in mind:

> [The libretto consisted of] 'four-beat half-rhymed verse', as conventional as possible and not too regular … Then, as feelings rise, the momentary situation will be crystallised in an aria in any measure, sometimes rhymed and sometimes half-rhymed. At some places too we come to what the composer calls 'a half number'. An example of this [act I scene i] is in the lines first spoken by Hobson and later repeated by Ellen:
>
> I have to go from pub to pub,
> Picking up parcels, standing about,
> The journey back is late at night.
>
> And so on to the end of the paragraph. This, as you will find, without quite breaking away from the frame of the recitative develops a little tune of its own.[8]

These 'half-numbers' may well be understood as *scena* – half *recitativo*, half *arioso* passages of action – suggesting adoption of a specifically Verdian technique.

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[5] Benjamin Britten, 'Peter Grimes' (1945), *Britten on Music*, p. 50.
[6] Benjamin Britten, 'Britten Talks to Edmund Tracey' (1966), *Britten on Music*, p. 293.
[7] Humphrey Carpenter, *Benjamin Britten: A Biography*, p. 201.
[8] Montagu Slater, 'The Story of the Opera', *Peter Grimes: Essays*, London, Sadler's Wells Opera Books No. 3, 1946, p. 20.

This 'number' opera thinking is evident from the first outline of the *Grimes* scenario, written by Pears on the ship the *Axel Johnson* on their journey back to England from America in 1942[9] [Fig. 2.1]. Not only is the scenario sketched in acts, scenes and numbers, which suggests generic allusion to wider eighteenth- and nineteenth-century practice, but conventions such as the final chorus and ensemble (act I scene iii no. 18) resonate more specifically with nineteenth-century Italian conventions of large-scale form. Set-piece designations are also made, including arias (for example act II scene ii no. 26 for Ellen) and duets (for example act II scene i no. 21 for Peter and Ellen). Furthermore, Pears introduces generic titles at this stage: no. 14 'Landlord starts drinking song', no. 35 'Grimes Mad Scene' and no. 37 'Ellen's Lament'. Thus, from the first stages of planning it appears that Pears and Britten were guided by 'number' opera precedents to structurally and dramatically shape the work.

Fig. 2.1 Pears's draft scenario (1942).

Prologue

No. 1 Ellen & old Grimes waiting.

No. 2 Enter Peter, drunk, is rude to Grimes, rebuked by Ellen, old Grimes asks for silence.

No. 3 Grimes's last speech & death.

No. 4 Duet (Peter maudlin, Ellen strong & loving).

No. 5 En'tracte (The Sea).

Act I scene i

No. 6 Chorus of Fishermen pulling in boats…

No. 7 Appearance of Grimes. His tale of the boy's death.

No. 8 Reaction of chorus, Ellen defends Grimes strongly & promises will not recur.

No. 9 Entrance of A announcing high tide. Immediate resumption of work chorus – Grimes, Ellen.

No. 10 En'tracte (Beginning of storm)

Act I scene ii

No. 11 Grimes' apostrophe of sea (appearance of old Grimes ghost?)

No. 12 En'tracte (storm invades)

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[9] BPL: 2-9401377. Termed L5 in: Paul Banks, 'Bibliographic Notes and Narratives', *The Making of Peter Grimes: Notes and Commentaries*, ed. Paul Banks, Woodbridge, The Boydell Press, 2000, p. 175. I have retained Pears's spellings in this hasty sketch.

Act I scene iii

No. 13	Chorus of confused servants, dwellers, travellers etc. storm raging.
No. 14	Landlord starts drinking song.
No. 15	Entrance Grimes. He sings.
No. 16	Round. Exeunt all. Grimes alone. Return of all with boy.
No. 17	Ellen explains she will take boy & look after him.
No. 18	Final chorus & ensemble.

Act II scene i

No. 19	Ellen's song (to Boy).
No. 20	Enter Grimes – refuses to let boy go.
No. 21	Duet & exit of Ellen.
No. 22	Grimes & the Boy.
No. 23	En'tracte

Act II scene ii

No. 24	Going to church.
No. 25	Trio of gossipers overheard by Ellen as she enters.
No. 26	Ellen's aria.
No. 27	Pub keeper's song.
No. 28	Duet & exeunt (chorus off).
No. 29	En'tracte

Act III scene i

No. 31	Stick-pickers chorus. Ent. Ellen.
No. 32	Ellen's [cradle] song.
No. 33	Chorus of horror & Ellen's strophe.

Act III scene ii

No. 34	En'tracte
No. 35	Grimes Mad Scene.
No. 36	Ellen's entrance, finds Peter.
No. 37	Ellen's lament.
No. 38	Fishermen's song.

The centrality of generic scenes in the early stages of the opera's genesis is underlined by Britten's draft scenario[10] [Fig. 2.2]. Here, the action includes:

[10] BPL: 2-9401378. Termed L6 in: Paul Banks, 'Bibliographic Notes and Narratives', p. 175.

'Magistrate scene' (Prologue), 'Pub scene' (act I scene ii), 'Church scene' (act II scene ii), 'Ellen Lament' (act III scene i) and 'P. G.'s Mad Scene' (act III scene ii). In an alternative version he also mentions a 'terrific court scene' for act II – later incorporated into the Prologue – and Peter's demise amongst the marshes (an ending not adopted here, but which acts as a precursor to the Madwoman's distress at the close of *Curlew River*). Britten also proposes a 'rumour chorus'. In light of the number of conspiratorial choruses in Verdi (the courtiers in *Rigoletto* for example) it is tempting to suggest that the Borough community may be interpreted in this light.

Fig. 2.2 Britten's draft scenario (1942).

Version I

Prologue	Magistrate scene. P.G. having done away with boy is let off with a warning.
Act I	
Sc. i	Seashore Hauling in of boats. Chorus working. Storm rising. P. G. has monologue about everything.
Sc. ii	Pub scene Storm. Arrival of Ellen & Boy
Act II	
Sc i	P. G.'s Hut Ellen cares for Boy. P. G. refuses to let him rest.
Sc. ii	Church scene Ellen disturbed seeks advice from villagers (rumour chorus?)
Sc. iii	P. G.'s Hut. Murder.
Act III	
Sc. i	Beach. Finding of Boy's coat. Fury of villagers. Ellen lament. Night.
Sc. ii	P. G.'s Mad scene & chorus as act I sc. ii & death.

Version II

Act I	as ver. I
Act II	as ver. I
Act III	Terrific court scene. P.G. forbidden ever to have boy again. P.G. is dismissed in disgrace

↓

Epilogue	P.G. on marshes, goes mad and dies

Perhaps the most significant document relating to Britten's conception of the work in 'numbers' and generic scenes, however, is his annotated copy of the libretto typescript, probably dating from September 1942[11] [Fig. 2.3]. (In the diagram all comments added in square brackets are Britten's additions. The numbers refer to the pages of the libretto manuscript.) Not only is the libretto divided into 'numbers' – recitative, aria, duet and so on – throughout, but Britten adds detailed notes about the structure and character of the music he was about to write. These annotations range from descriptions of mood – 'mostly conversational (mood, quiet at first, gradually becoming more & more lively as storm increases)'[12] – to orchestration – 'over single percussion instrument'[13] – to structural descriptions – '(a set aria) quiet for Ellen'.[14] Britten marks set-pieces as well as what may be termed *scena con arioso*: 'mostly recitative with small set numbers interspersed'.[15] This use of *scena* resonates with that found in Verdi's middle and late works, which consists of loosely structured musical settings of 'speech-like' dialogue in moments of dramatic action or, in Harold Powers' terms, the 'kinetic' passages that link and prompt set-pieces, or 'static' phases.[16] There is a strong suggestion, then, that generic allusion to 'number' opera is accompanied by specific allusion to Verdian *scena* techniques.

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[11] BPL: 2-9401388. Termed L15 in: Paul Banks, 'Bibliographic Notes and Narratives', p. 177.
[12] Libretto typescript, p. 17.
[13] *Ibid.*, p. 22.
[14] *Ibid.*, p. 36.
[15] *Ibid.*, p. 12
[16] Harold Powers, 'Making "Macbeth" Musicabile', *Verdi: Macbeth*, English National Opera Guide No. 41, ed. Nicholas John, London, John Calder, 1990, p. 21.

Britten's working processes, which were characterised by mapping out set-pieces and taking into account generic possibilities in a detailed scenario before proceeding to collaborate actively in the drafting of the libretto, also resonates with Verdian practice.[17] The Italian composer's correspondence with his librettists frequently demonstrates a concern for generic precedent at the libretto stage, and often betrays a tension between the demands of singers and his wish to push these established forms to the limits. Letters between Verdi and Ghislanzioni during the genesis of *Aïda* are a case in point.[18] Other signs of Italian opera thinking in the *Peter Grimes* scenario include the 'lively "patter"' designation for the sextet in act I, redolent of Rossini, and the vocal casting – 'heavy' for Balstrode, 'light' for the Nieces, 'rhetoric[al]' for Boles and so on.

Fig. 2.3 Britten's annotated libretto typescript (1942).

Cast

Peter Grimes	A Fisherman (30)	Tenor	[lyric]
Boy	His apprentice (14)	Silent	
Ellen Orford	A widow, schoolmistress of the Borough	Soprano	[lyric]
Capt. Balstrode	Retired Merchant Skipper	Baritone	[heavy]
Niece 1			

[17] Luke Jensen, 'An Introduction to Verdi's Working Methods', *The Cambridge Companion to Verdi*, p. 262. 'The next stage [in the composition of *Aïda*] ... was a more extended prose libretto of thirty-seven pages in Verdi's own hand. Indicated in the margin were the ways in which each passage was to be set – 'lirico', 'cantabile', 'concertato', 'recitativo', and so on.' Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi*, Vol. 3, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2002, p. 171.

[18] Verdi to Ghislanzioni (16 October 1870) 'Develop this situation [duet for Amneris and Radames act IV] then as you think best, and let it be well developed, and have the characters say what they must without concerning yourself in the least about the musical form ... Of course if you send me a recitative from beginning to end, I would be unable to create rhythmic music, but if you begin directly with some rhythm and continue it until the end I will not complain at all. Just perhaps it should be changed so as to make a little cabalettina at the end.' Quoted in: Philip Gossett, 'Verdi, Ghislanzioni, and "Aida": The Uses of Convention', *Critical Enquiry*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1974, p. 313.

Niece 2	Main attractions of 'The Boar' (each about 20)	Sopranos	[light]
Robt. Boles	Fisherman and Methodist (40)	Tenor	[rhetoric]
Swallow	A Lawyer	Bass	[heavy, pompous]
Mrs. Sedley (Nabob)	A widow of an East India company's factor (50)	Mezzo-soprano	[character]
Rev. Horace Adams	The Rector (40)	Tenor	[light comic]
Ned Keene	Apothecary and quack	Baritone	[jocular]
Dr. Crabbe		Silent	
[Hobson]	[Carter to policeman]	[Bass]	[loud]

Prologue	Court theme, then recitative throughout Hobson 'Peter Grimes!'		1
Orchestral Interlude		['Every day' grey seascape]	6
[No. 1]	General Ensemble. Chorus of Fishermen and Women Chorus 'Oh hang at open doors the net, the cork'		7
[No. 1 cont.]	Sextet Rector 'Good morning, good morning'	[lively 'patter']	10
[No. 1 cont.]	Recit. over chorus Ned 'I'm coming tonight to see your nieces'		10

[No. 2]	[Recit.] Grimes 'Hi. Give us a hand'		11
[No. 3]	Quartet Balstrode 'I'll give you a hand. The tide is near the turn'	['working' quartet (Bals. and Keene in heavy accents, Auntie and Boles quicker)]	11
[No. 4]	Scene Keene 'Grimes, you won't need help from now'	[mostly recitative with small set numbers interspersed]	12
[No. 5]	Aria Ellen 'Let her among you without fault cast the first stone'	[slow tune]	14
[No. 6]	Recitative Ellen 'Mr. Hobson, where's your cart?'		14
[No. 7]	Solo & chorus Balstrode 'Look! The storm cone!	[lively ensemble, with quick interjections. (approaching storm)]	15
[No. 8]	Scene Balstrode 'And do you prefer the storm?'	[mostly conversational (mood, quiet at first, gradually becoming more & more lively as storm increases)]	17
Orchestral Interlude		[Storm at its height]	22
Act I Scene ii			
[No. 1]	Recitative Auntie 'Past time to close'	[(over single percussion instrument)]	22
[No. 2]	Quartet Auntie 'Loud man, O never in my time'	[(half angry – half comic)]	25
[No. 3]	Scene continued First fisherman 'There's been a landslide up the coast'	[recit. as before]	26

[No. 4]	Solo with chorus Balstrode 'Pub conversation should depend'		27
[No. 5]	Recitative Ned 'Have you heard there's been a break up by Peter Grimes's hut?'	[storm & their recit. (as before)]	28
[No. 6]	Aria Peter 'The great boar and Pliades'	[quiet ecstasy]	29
[No. 7]	Ensemble I Chorus 'He's mad or drunk'	[Recit.]	30
[No. 8]	[Round]	[Gradual crescendo as more and more voices enter ↓ Hush as Grimes sings]	31
[No. 9]	[Recit.] Hobson 'The bridge is down'		32
Act II Scene i **Orchestral** **Prelude**		[(sunny, sparkling, music which leads to and accompanies↓)]	34
[No. 1]	Solo with chorus off Ellen 'This sun in his own morning'	[(bright, florid)]	34
	Ellen 'You're not too young to know'	[(a set aria) quiet]	36
[No. 2]	[Duet (with chorus off)] Choir (off) 'O ye light and darkness, bless ye the Lord'		37
[No. 3]	Trio Auntie 'Fool to let it come to this'	['gossipy' quick]	39
[No. 4]	Recitative Auntie 'Doctor!'		40

[No. 5]	Chorus Fellow Lawyer 'Dullards build their self-esteem'	[chorus ostinato with interjections from soloists]	41
[No. 6]	Recitative with chorus Boles 'People … No. I will speak … This thing here concerns you all'	[At climax quick passionate recitative]	42
[No. 7]	[solo with ensemble (with chorus)] Ellen 'We planned that our lives should have a new start'		43
[No. 8]	Recit. Rector 'Swallow – shall we go and see Grimes in his home?'		44
[No. 9]	Chorus (as they go) The crowd 'Now is gossip put on trial'	[chorus of inspection (march rhythm).]	45
[No. 10]	Quartet Auntie 'We are women. Why should we trouble at their clumsy ways?'	[meditative]	46
Orchestral Interlude		['Boy's suffering' (<u>fugato</u>) passacaglia]	46
Act II scene ii			
[No. 1]	Scene Grimes 'Go there! Here's your sea boots'	[Recitative starting violently]	47
	Grimes 'Look. We'll make a record catch'	[(Enthusiastic set piece)]	48
	Grimes 'My thinking builds for us a kindlier home'	[(quiet set piece)]	48
[No. 2]	[Recit. with chorus] Chorus 'Now is gossip put on trial'	[chorus as in last scene. Gradual crescendo]	49

Act III scene i			
[Introduction]	[Summer night, seascape quiet]		53
[No. 1]	Trio Swallow 'Assign your prettiness to me'	[gay (Swallow slightly pompous)]	53
[No. 2]	Recit. Over Dance Music off Niece 2 'Ned Keene is chasing me, gives me no peace'	[Dance music, of rustic type, violin, clarinet & drums predominantly]	54
[No. 3]	Song Mrs. Nabob 'Murder most foul it is'	[conspiratorial]	55
[No. 4]	Recit. Keene 'Are you mad, old woman Or is it too much laudanum?'	[as before over Dance music (country dance)]	56
[No. 5]	Song Rector 'I looked in a moment, the company's gay'	[(parsonic but amiable)]	57
[No. 6]	Recit. Chorus 'Good night'	[dance music again]	57
[No. 7]	Aria Ellen	[dance music fades (desperately sad)]	59
[No. 8]	Recit. Over Dance, Music off Balstrode 'We'll find him, maybe give him a hand'		59
Act III scene ii	[orchestra fades out leaving only fog-horn (off) and chorus shouting in far distance (orchestra is silent throughout the scene)]		62
[No. 1]	Scene Peter 'Quietly. Here you are. You're home'	[(Demented hysterical)]	62

[No. 2]	[Recitative (spoken quietly & quickly)] Balstrode 'I'll help you with the boat now'	64
[No. 3]	Recitative and final chorus Swallow 'There's a boat sinking out at sea'	66

Appendix VI underlines the similarity between the construction of the 1945 score of *Peter Grimes* and Verdian middle-period opera. (The columns represent: (1) act and number; (2) page numbers in the Boosey & Hawkes vocal score; (3) description of section and opening line; (4) tempo; (5) brief description of the action.) The numbering of sections, based on Verdian *convenzioni*, broadly follows those of Britten's annotated libretto except: act I scene i no. 5, where *scena* appears a more appropriate description as the *arioso* sections blend with the *recitativo* rather than standing as separate sections; act I scene ii no. 12, where the *arioso* appears to emerge seamlessly from the *recitativo* following the duet; act I scene i no. 13, where the *scena* once again appears more continuous than Britten's sub-divisions. The balance of arias (Ellen's introductory aria in act I scene i and Grimes' aria in act I scene ii), and the distribution of ensembles and recitatives across the work, as well as the chorus 'finale' in act II, resonates with Verdian middle-period practice. The generic scenes also invoke the wider Italian tradition, with a 'scene-setting' storm near the beginning (act I scene i) and the 'mad scene' at the close (act III scene ii). Further, the work resonates with Verdi's later period, through the convention of the 'action' prelude, which is found in the opening of *Otello*. However, allusion to the traditional orchestral 'interlude' is pushed to extreme, as the 'Sea Interludes' provide *six* interjections into the operatic structure, a striking example of generic transformation.

2. Generic scenes: storm, society and scene-painting

We now turn to the generic scenes in *Grimes*. Here, comparisons with Verdian examples reveal musical 'signs' derived from the wider operatic tradition, as well as more specific allusions.

In *Grimes*, the chorus is unified by the adversity of the weather. As the gale is sighted (act I scene i no. 7) the solidarity of the community is defined in relation to the raging elements. Later, as it howls outside 'The Boar' (act I scene ii no. 1), their discourse in the warm interior is interrupted by the opening and closing of the door, marked by orchestral gusts of wind and lashing waves. Indeed, Britten was drawn to *Peter Grimes* in part because of its sense of 'place', in which the atmospheric conditions are an integral part.[19] Moreover, due to Peter's position in the storm outside before his first 'real time' entrance, he is aligned with the tempest, the unknown and dangerous; he is revealed as literally out of 'place'. His affiliation with the weather, paradoxically, underlines his human alienation.

The storm scenes in *Peter Grimes* allude to two of Verdi's most affecting storms: the opening of *Otello* and act III of *Rigoletto*. The tempestuous opening of *Otello* is marked by tense tremolando figures, fluttering arpeggios and chromaticism, musical 'signs' referring to the wider tradition of 'mimetic' storm representation [Fig. 2.4]. Britten wrote admiringly of this scene, saying: 'No one has ever made the orchestra roar so terrifyingly as at the beginning of *Otello*'.[20] There is suggestion, then, that it may have been a conscious model. The 'roar' that Britten refers to may be attributed to the bass drums, gong and suspended cymbals that Verdi includes, as well as the famous organ cluster of three notes a semitone apart that lasts 255 bars, creating a constant moan beneath the unfolding action. The storm both frames and interjects in the foreground of the scene and, importantly for this discussion it prompts a diegetic

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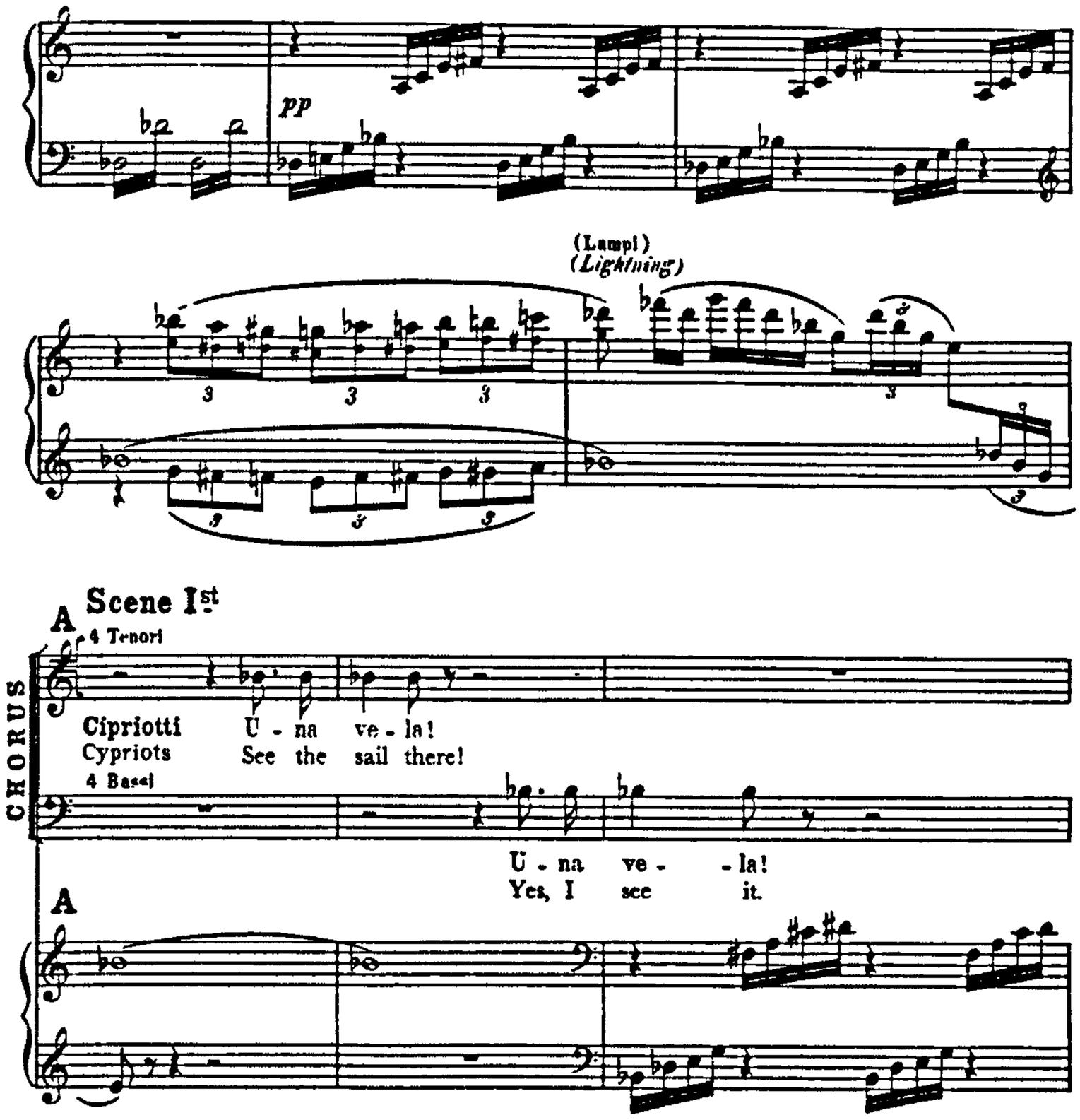
[19] 'For most of my life I have lived closely in touch with the sea. My parent's house in Lowestoft directly faced the sea, and my life as a child was coloured by fierce storms that sometimes drove ships on the coast and ate away whole stretches of neighbouring cliffs. In writing *Peter Grimes*, I wanted to express my awareness of the perpetual struggle of men and women whose livelihood depends on the sea – difficult though it is to treat such a universal subject in theatrical form.' Benjamin Britten, 'Peter Grimes' (1945), *Britten on Music*, p. 50.

[20] Benjamin Britten, 'Verdi – A Symposium' (1951), *Britten on Music*, p. 102.

preghiera for the chorus, as they fear for the life of Otello at sea.[21] Furthermore, the storm itself is centralised here. The presence of the storm outside with Otello acts as a sign of Otello's strength – emphasising the distance of his later fall – as well as a sign of his 'wildness' suggesting the underlying recklessness of his tempestuous inner life.

Fig. 2.4 Storm scene, *Otello*, act I scene i, p. 2.



Britten's first storm scene (act I scene i no. 7) is marked by sinister *tremolo* chords, at which Balstrode announces, 'look, the storm cone!'[22] [Fig. 2.5] It is followed by silence, a sign of mortality suggesting the very real danger that the villagers face. 'Signs' of the storm abound as in the Verdi example, resonating with the storm genre. Moreover, Britten's allusion to the wider operatic tradition is underlined by the orchestration, including punctuated timpani rolls, snare drum, cymbal, the dark sonorities of trombones (traditionally associated with death) and wailing woodwind. More specifically, Sackville-West highlights a direct link between

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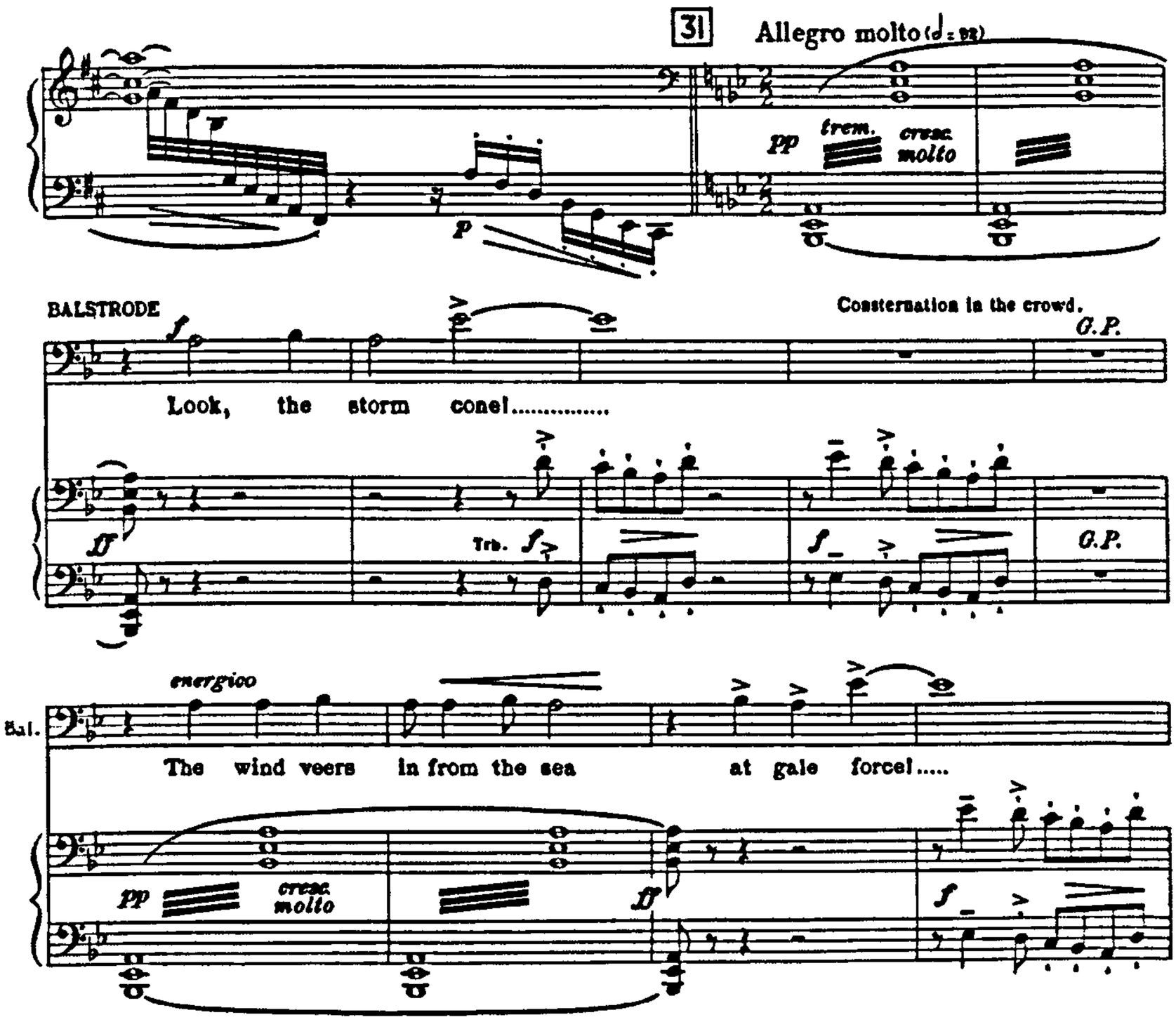
[21] Giuseppe Verdi, *Otello*, trans. Walter Ducloux, New York, G. Schirmer, 1963, p. 13.
[22] Benjamin Britten, *Peter Grimes*, Op. 33, London, Boosey & Hawkes, 2003, p. 65.

Verdi's and Britten's approach to orchestration: 'the orchestra used in *Peter Grimes* is, by operatic standards of the past sixty years, modest; it is, in fact, the orchestra of the later Verdi operas'.[23]

Fig. 2.5 Storm scene, *Peter Grimes*, act I scene i, p. 65.



Other more specific allusions to Verdi are also evident. As in *Otello* the chorus sing their own *preghiera* (prayer) for safety against the elements. Although the text is not explicitly 'religious' it conveys the sense of pleading with a higher, even numinous, power.[24] They define their identity through strophic, diegetic, song. This, as in Verdi, serves both to set the scene of the opera – the cold sea and the adverse elements – and to define the societal backdrop to the drama to follow. (In turn, this invokes the earlier precedents of *opera seria*, where the chorus play a strong structural role, frequently alternating between 'menace and entreaty'.)[25] However, while the 'communal pleading' of Verdi's chorus is indicative of an apparently unshakable solidarity, in *Grimes* we have already seen the bickering eccentricity of the Borough

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[23] Edward Sackville-West, 'The musical and dramatic structure', *Peter Grimes: Essays*, p. 30.
[24] Giuseppe Verdi, *Otello*, p. 13.
[25] Ivan Navel, *Autonomy and Mercy: Reflections on Mozart's Operas*, trans. Marion Faber and Ivan Nagel, Cambridge Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1991, p. 3.

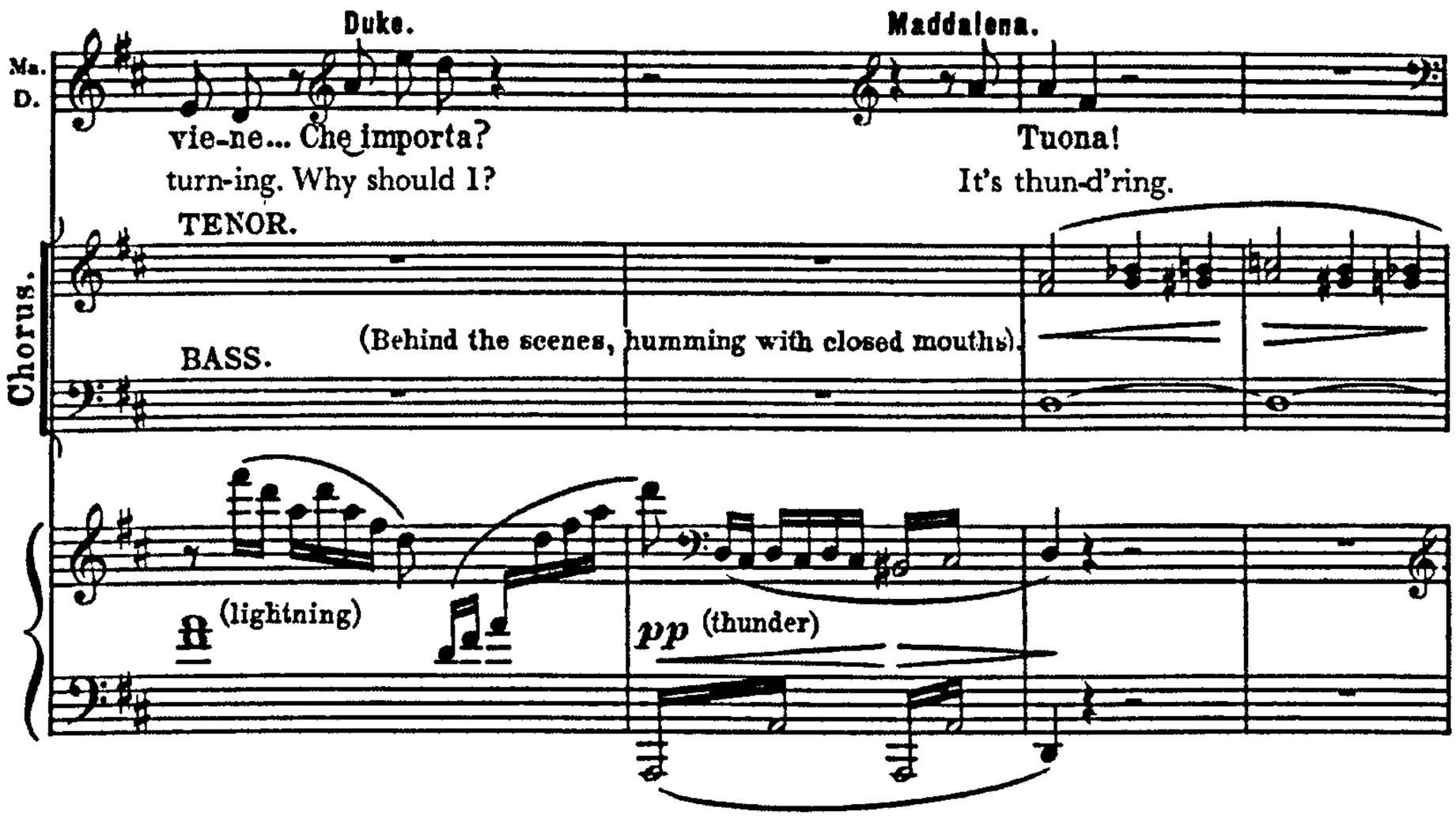
residents in the 'flash back' to the trial that acts as the prologue. In Britten's work, therefore, society achieves only a transitory unity. These internal tensions are also deeply prophetic: if the Borough residents are united against the elements, it is only one step further for them to be united against one of their number; group hatred turned inwards rather than outwards.

Moreover, unlike the Verdian examples, the scene is a *concertato*, with complex layering of voices. It is a synthesis of set piece *preghiera* and a *scena con coro* as the chorus alternate between verses of their diegetic song and their accompaniment to the *recitativo* action, reaching a striking climax of convergence. Furthermore, the scene is supported by insistent ostinato patterns that gradually build towards a climax in a Stravinskian manner (for example the shifting and cumulative repetitions that characterise Britten's beloved *Symphony of Psalms* and *Oedipus Rex*): *scena con coro/concertato – coro* climax (fig. 35) – *scena con coro – preghiera* – entrance of Peter working on his boat; just one example of the multiple influences that run alongside those of Verdi. Paradoxically, the regularity of this accompaniment contributes to the affect of the storm's power and irrationality. Moreover, the irony when the opening of *Otello* and Britten's scene are placed side-by-side is great. When Otello arrives with his ship he is greeted with adulation and a victory chorus. When Peter arrives with his boat he is met with silence and reproach. Nowhere is the contrast between hero and anti-hero so strongly signalled through the implications of these Verdian allusions.

In Britten's second storm scene in act I scene ii no. 1, *Rigoletto* is more strongly evoked. Verdi's act IV no. 17 storm is fully integrated into the action, weaving through the scene, at times dominating and at times acting as a backdrop to the drama [Fig. 2.6].[26]

[26] Giuseppe Verdi, *La traviata*, trans. Ruth and Thomas Martin, New York, G. Schirmer, 1961, p. 195.

Fig. 2.6 Storm scene, *Rigoletto*, act IV no. 17, p. 197.



Musical 'signs' of the storm include tremolo string chords and piccolo arpeggios suggesting far off thunder and lightening, a wordless chromatic chorus suggesting the moaning wind, and woodwind staccato semiquavers suggesting heavy rain. The embedded set-piece trio for Maddalena, Sparafucile and Gilda (dressed as a male beggar) is interrupted by the opening and closing of the door to the room – the very same external-internal tension found in Britten's scene. The interjections of the storm shape the structure of the scene, which consists of: (1) *scena* and storm; (2) trio; (3) storm interlude; (4) recommenced trio with Gilda's stabbing; (5) long diminuendo of storm music; (6) Rigoletto's triumphant recitative; (7) the Duke's 'Donna è mobile'; (8) flashes of lightening reveal Gilda; (9) final duet and Gilda's death. Moreover, the storm appears to play an integral part in the plot, both reinforcing the atmosphere through pathetic fallacy, and revealing Gilda's dead body at the close with two flashes of lightening. In *Peter Grimes*, the scene is also shaped by the storm as the roar of the chromatic descents, *sf* shock chords and tremolando cluster chords with cymbal crashes intervene into the prevailing action each time the door is opened.

Furthermore, the elements, this time the sea itself, punctuate the work on a large-scale. Britten's famous sea interludes – six spans of purely orchestral music – appear to serve at least four functions within the opera. Firstly, they describe the visual landscape in order to set the scene for the following action (particularly the third interlude prior to the church scene in act II). Secondly, they suggest 'interior' landscapes by exploring the emotional state of characters (for example the fourth

interlude that describes the boy's suffering). Thirdly, they act as narrative sections, (for example the fourth interlude). Fourthly, they integrate 'non-representational' processes into the work. As Christopher Morris suggests, the interludes are poised between 'description' and 'absolute' motivic working.[27] The headings that Britten added to the libretto sketch to describe the sections underline his understanding of their multiple functions: (1) 'everyday grey seascape'; (2) 'storm at its height'; (3) marked *prelude*: 'sunny, sparkling music' leading to the following church scene; (4) 'Boy's suffering passacaglia'; (5) marked *introduction*: 'Summer night, seascape quiet'.

Aligning Britten's interludes with Verdi's instrumental music suggests some generic allusions. Considering the instrumental music in Verdian opera, Kimbell suggests that orchestral sections – interludes as well as battles, storms, dances – create the 'social frame'[28] of opera. Furthermore, they are intimately linked with stage-craft, through scene changes, visual spectacle and even pantomime. The emotion of the characters is also frequently implied by instrumental means. Such scene setting is clearly suggested by the more pictorial of Britten's descriptions. Moreover, the 'Boy's suffering passacaglia' suggests the exploration of an interior state. While Britten's orchestral passages frequently allude to Verdian uses of the *intermezzo*, however, they also allude to Wagnerian interludes through their denser play of motives. As well as containing 'themes of reminiscence',[29] a typically Verdian use of 'obvious' motives to link dramatic action and to mark character, Britten uses the interludes to link sections thematically, involving a technique closer to leitmotiv and the 'art of transition'.

3. Church scene and Ellen's 'lament'

Just as the chorus participate in hymn-like utterance at the opening of act I, they also literally form a congregation in the background to the 'exchange' between Ellen and the Boy at the beginning of act II. This recalls similar moments in Verdi, such as the

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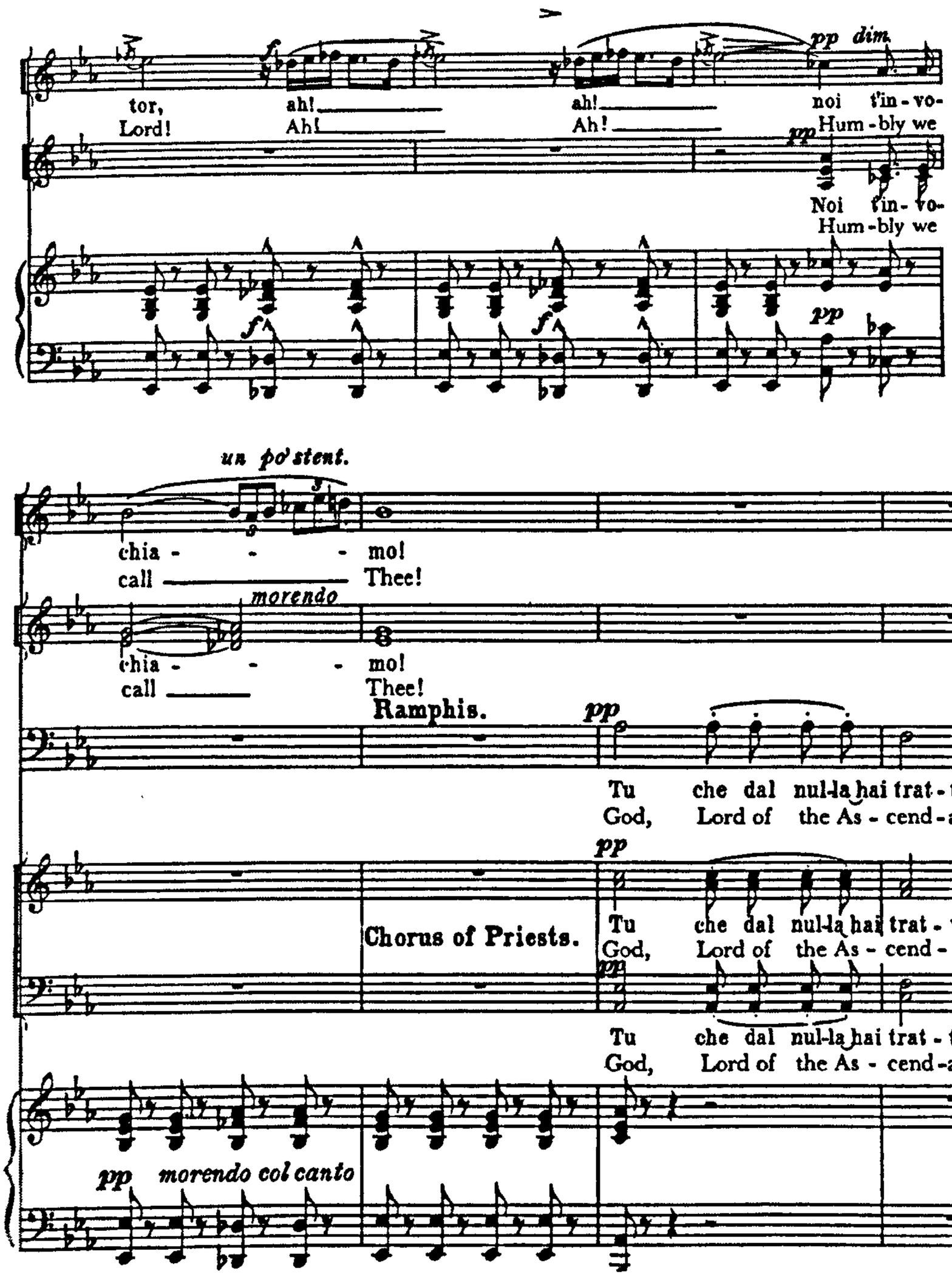
[27] Christopher Morris, *Reading Opera Between the Lines: Orchestral Interludes and Musical Meaning from Wagner to Berg*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002.
[28] David Kimbell, 'Instrumental Music in Verdi's Operas', *The Cambridge Companion to Verdi*, p. 154.
[29] Joseph Kerman, 'Verdi's Use of Recurring Themes', *Studies in Music History*, ed. Harold Powers, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1968, pp. 495-510.

prayer scenes in *Aïda* and the songs of the priests in *Don Carlos*, where foreground 'action' and off-stage ceremonies are dramatically layered.

Verdi's 'grand scene of consecration' that forms the act II finale of *Aïda* centres on the solemn rites of the priestesses and priests.[30] The high priestess begins the ceremony off-stage by singing to the Almighty Fthà in an ululating 'mock-oriental' manner, with much ornamentation over a punctuated quaver accompaniment. The chorus of on-stage priests answer homophonically on one chord, using typically Verdian ritual utterance and are unaccompanied [Fig. 2.7].

Fig. 2.7 Off-stage scene of consecration, *Aïda*, act II finale, pp. 60-61.

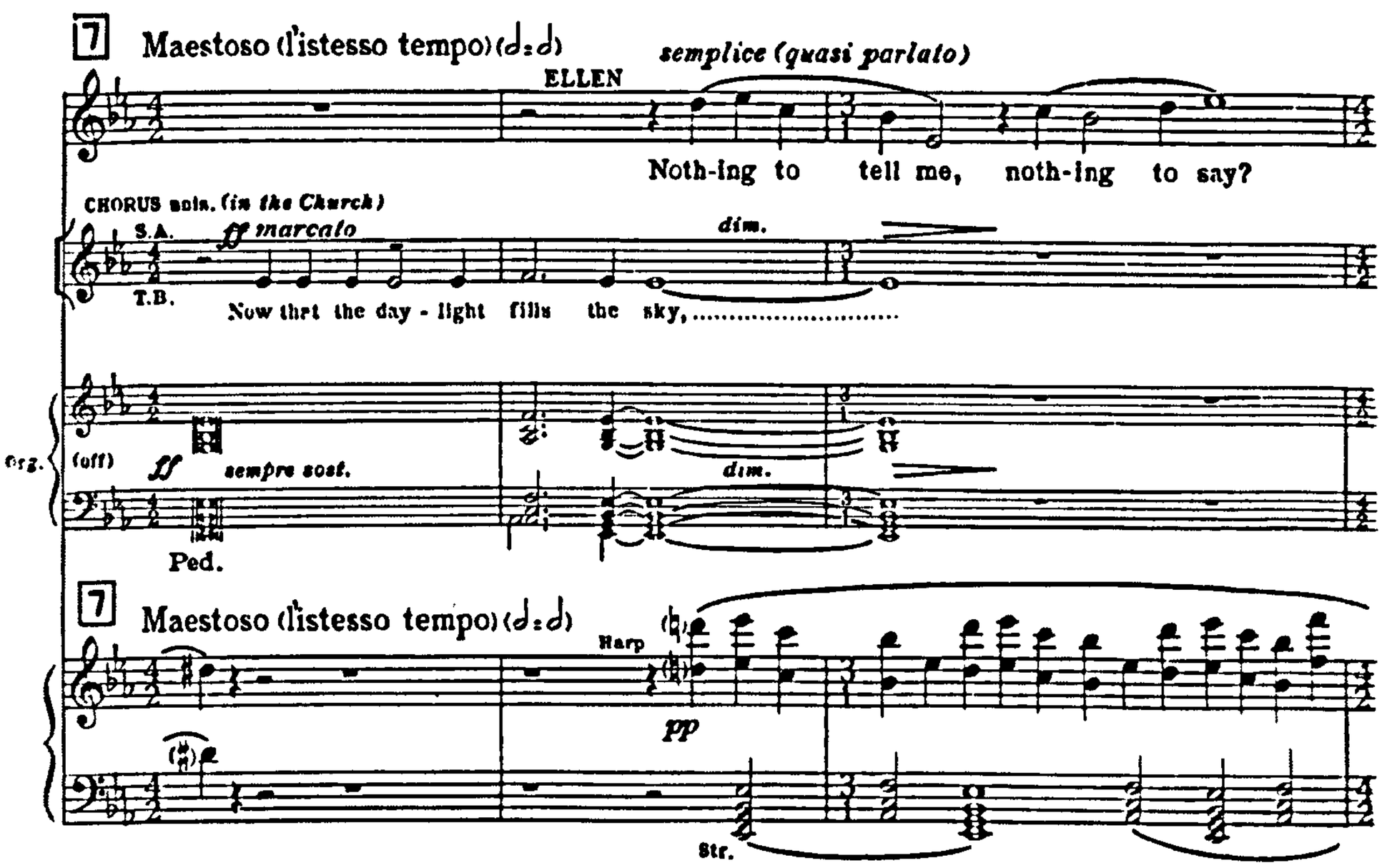


[30] Giuseppe Verdi, *Aïda*, p. 60.

After a similar exchange, and the 'Dance of the Priestesses', Radames and Ramphis participate in a solemn *preghiera* for success in war. The ritual atmosphere is heightened through the exotic 'plainsong' style utterance, the use of hushed homophony, the question-and-answer format and the withdrawal of the orchestra. Similar signifiers are present in the Christian priest scene in act II of *Don Carlos*. Again off-stage, the friars sing a parable about the sinfulness of Charles V in ritual homophony. Again, a call-and-response exchange occurs between the head friar and the others. The scene progresses towards a combined *preghiera* for God's forgiveness.

After the orchestral introduction in act II of *Peter Grimes*, Ellen and the Boy settle outside the church. The ongoing service is first signified by the organ and church bells (on the tritone E*b* in A major). At fig. 7 the first hymn begins, consisting of an off-stage unison chorus with organ, over which is layered the continuing 'conversation' of Ellen and the (silent) 'Boy' [Fig. 2.8].

Fig. 2.8 Off-stage church service, *Peter Grimes*, act II scene i, p. 183.



As David Matthews notes, the first of the hymns is derived from actual liturgical music: 'The congregation sings the opening hymn, "now that the daylight fills the sky". The hymn is an English version of the Latin hymn "Iam lucis orto sidere" from

the office of prime, and Britten has used the simplification of the plainsong setting given as Hymn I in *Hymns Ancient and Modern*.'[31] Recalling the trial scene in *Aïda*, there is a separation between the ritual events inside the church and the personal, sentimental conversation outside, both in real-time. Unlike the *Aïda* and *Don Carlos* examples, however, the chorus is not accompanied by the orchestra but by the organ, thus extending and manipulating the generic allusions to Verdi's off-stage ceremonies. Britten creates two levels of diction that phase in and out of one another, a technique that has been associated with the fade effects of film (and a reminder of Britten's work with the GPO).

The ritual effect of the scene continues with a further four sections, each marked by sections of the Mass, including call-and-response. The most striking element here is the way in which Ellen's discovery of the bruises on the Boy and her conversation with Peter that lead to him cruelly striking her, are linked with the words and sentiments of the congregation. The irony with which Grimes utters the words 'And God have mercy upon me!'[32] at the climax of his fury, sharply questions the sincerity of the community. Thus, as well as adapting Verdian elements, Britten introduces a more complex interaction between the strands of material to highlight the central tensions of the work: Peter's emotional struggles with Ellen, with the boys in his 'care' and most crucially with himself.[33] This scene thus emphasises the tragic conflict in Peter's mind and also suggests something rather sinister about the service itself – ironically questioning the 'religiosity' of the Borough gossips. Indeed, this resonates strongly with Verdi's often negative portrayal of organised religion – the unfeeling priests in *Don Carlos*, the corrupt council of ten in *I due Foscari* to name but two examples. Ellen perhaps is a symbol of the possibility of religious salvation (underlined by her aria 'He without sin shall cast the first stone') although with Peter's suicide this, too, is called sharply into question.[34] Britten's scene is thus also evocative of this wider propensity towards secular/sacred layering.

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[31] David Matthews, 'Act II scene 1: An Examination of the Music', *Benjamin Britten: Peter Grimes*, p. 126.
[32] Benjamin Britten, *Peter Grimes*, p. 205.
[33] Hans Keller, 'Peter Grimes: The Story, the Music not Excluded', *Benjamin Britten: Peter Grimes*, p. 117.
[34] Stephen Arthur Allen, '"He descended into Hell": Peter Grimes, Ellen Orford and Salvation Denied', *Cambridge Companion to Benjamin Britten*, ed. Mervyn Cooke, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 83.

In Pears's and Britten's sketches a 'lament' for Ellen was to follow Peter's decision to go out to kill himself in a sinking boat. At first glance it appears that this idea did not find an outlet in *Peter Grimes*. The position following Peter's decision is a spoken exchange, highlighting through its non-musicality its dramatic significance. However, the lament is not missing, it merely occurs earlier in act III when Balstrode and Ellen find the jumper of Peter's apprentice and fear for his death. The section consists of a tense *scena* exchange between Balstrode and Ellen, an aria for Ellen 'Embroidery in childhood was a luxury of idleness' and then a further *scena*. This tripartite design – *scena*, aria, *scena* – echoes James Hepokoski's description of the more flexible structural divisions in Verdi's later works, *Otello* in particular.[35]

The lament genre is usually associated with imminent death or the recent death of a loved one, and is characterised by circling motion, wailing and sobbing figures (often gestures falling by a semitone). The context is apt here, as the discovery of the child's clothing confirms for Ellen Peter's guilt and perhaps even the inevitability of his demise. Ellen's 'lament' aria is arranged in an ABA' structure, suggesting Baroque organisation. The opening *andante con moto tranquillo* begins with a *pp* delicate line abounding in sixth intervals and semitonal inflections, reaching a wailing intensity. The transparent broken chord quaver figurations in the orchestra reflect Verdi's set-piece accompaniments (for example the transparent textures that support Alfredo and Violetta's love duet in act I no. 4 of *La traviata*), off-set by the irregularity of the 5/8 time signature. The affect of the music is also evocative of innocence due to its use of repetition and childlike simplicity. Sobbing is suggested through the short phrase lengths and the semiquaver rest that punctuates the fourth bar. The second half of the A section consists of an inversion of the first two phrases followed by an undulating descent, weaving though semi-tonal alternations, which is followed, in the manner of an echo *senza espress.*, by another descent.

The B section is marked *parlando* with staccato indications denoting Ellen's negative epiphany as she realises Peter's danger. A return to *cantabile* marks the A' section, this time involving flat-side swings (from A to E*b*) suggesting Peter's doom.

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[35] James Hepokoski, *Giuseppe Verdi: Otello*, p. 139.

The *aria* ends *senza espress.* with repeated descending phrases as though Ellen can barely face the consequence of their discovery – as she states: 'the meaning we avoid'.[36] Ellen's helplessness is underlined in the following *scena* 'we have no power to help him now – we have no power'.[37] Although the section concludes with an assertion of solidarity even in extremity: 'We shall be there with him'.[38] The pleading dramatic role played by Ellen and the allusions to the lament genre are also frequently shared by Verdian heroines. We may think of the pleading Desdemona in *Otello*, and Amneris's lamentations for Radamés in *Aïda* to name but two.

4. Tavern dances and *brindisi*

Ellen's lamentations in act III could not be further from the frivolity of the tavern dances earlier in the act. Here, Britten creates a rustic atmosphere through dances played by off-stage *banda* amid raucous cries from the chorus. Britten's choice of dances – Barn Dance, Ländler, Hornpipe, Galop – is interesting both in relation to the generic 'pastiche' style of the *banda* music and also for their national associations. The dances are truly multinational – the Barn Dance from America, the Ländler from Germany, the Hornpipe from the British Isles and the Galop from Austria. Interestingly though, the Galop has frequently been introduced into Italian opera, particularly in finale sections, for example the overture of Rossini's *Guillaume Tell* (1829) and the 'Dance of the Hours' in Ponchielli's *La Gioconda* (1876). Moreover, these moments of sonic layering recall the dance scenes in Berg's *Wozzeck* (particularly the overlapping of the opera orchestra with the dance-band in act II scene iv and honky-tonk piano in act II scene iii), as well as those in Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* (particularly the 'low-down blues' for on-stage piano in act I scene i, and the colourful African drums and eclectic assortment of organs, combs and bones that accompany the dances on Kittiwah Island in act II scene ii).

The use of 'popular' dance music as the background to action is present in both *Rigoletto* and *La traviata*, while the use of the off-stage *banda* is part of Verdi's *festivo* style. The waltzes in *La traviata* phase in and out of the action, painting the

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[36] Benjamin Britten, *Peter Grimes*, p. 322.
[37] *Ibid.*, p. 324.
[38] *Ibid.*, p. 325.

tinta of Parisian life. *Rigoletto* act I, however, is structurally particularly close to the dance scene in *Peter Grimes*, so close, in fact, that it appears to be a model. The act consists of eight sections: (1) introduction and *scena* for the Duke and Borsa over a dance background; (2) a *Ballata* for the Duke ('Questo o quella per me pari sono'); (3) *scena* for the Duke and Countess Ceprano over a *minuetto e perigordino*; (4) the return of the introductory music with *coro*; (5) the return of the *Ballata* theme forming an interlude; (6) the return of the opening music once again, this time to support a *concertato* culminating in a revenge chorus against Rigoletto; (7) Monterone's curse and the cessation of the dance background; (8) a *vivace stretta* chorus calling for a *vendetta* on Rigoletto. The dances here not only evoke the social context of the action – the Duke's court – but also comment critically on the morality of the courtiers and indeed the Duke himself. Suggestion of sexual promiscuity is underlined, as Pierluigi Petrobelli has shown, by the scene's resonance and thematic borrowings from act II of *Don Giovanni*.[39]

As may be seen in Fig. 2.9 the construction of the dance scene in *Grimes* is strikingly similar to that found in *Rigoletto*, consisting as it does of a sequence of *scena* passages over off-stage *banda* leading to a *concertato* ('our curse shall fall on his evil day')[40] and *stretta* climaxing with vicious repetitions of Peter's name. The structural musical parallels are complemented by dramatic ones. Like Rigoletto, Peter has a vendetta put upon him, and like the Duke the society is aligned through the dances with immorality. It is no coincidence that the 'Nieces' (clearly prostitutes) are given a starring role here, seducing the very pillars of society that, symbolically at least, uphold it. Moreover, the similarities between Peter and Rigoletto are numerous. Both men are outcasts and critics of the society in which they find themselves, both are insightful and visionary (Peter through his philosophical musings and Rigoletto through his humour); both are 'disfigured' (Peter 'morally' and Rigoletto 'physically' although the two are implied together); both kill the very people that they most wish to possess and protect (Peter his apprentice boys – clearly with paedophilic overtones – Rigoletto his daughter – clearly with incestuous ones); both are seen as somehow 'deviant' and thus made scapegoats. Rigoletto is punished unjustly through the death

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[39] Pierluigi Petrobelli, *Music in the Theatre: Essays on Verdi and Other Composers*, trans. Roger Parker, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1994, 'Verdi and *Don Giovanni*: On the Opening Scene of *Rigoletto*', pp. 34-47.
[40] Benjamin Britten, *Peter Grimes*, p. 341.

of another and Peter is punished through his own suicide. *Grimes* and *Rigoletto* are both operas about the tragedy of men who misunderstand and are misunderstood by the societies that surround them.

Fig. 2.9 Dance scenes: *Rigoletto* act I and *Peter Grimes* act III scene i.

	***Rigoletto* act I**		***Peter Grimes* act III scene i**
1	*Scena* Duke and Borsa over dance background	**1**	*Scena with Barn Dance* Nieces and Swallow over dance background
2	*Ballata* Duke	**2**	*Scena with Ländler* Mrs Sedley and Mr Keene over dance background
3	*Scena con Minuetto e Perigordino* Duke and Countess Ceprano over dance background	**3**	*Scena with Hornpipe* Burgess and Doctor over dance background
4	*Coro* Chorus with reprise of (1)	**4**	*Scena* Mrs Sedley, Ellen and Balstrode, with *no* dance background
5	*Orchestral Interlude* Reprise of *Ballata* dance (2)	**5**	*Scena with Galop* Mrs Sedley calls for Swallow
6	*Concertato* Revenge chorus with reprise of (1)	**6**	*Concertato* Cursing chorus
7	*Scena* Monterone's curse, with *no* dance background	**7**	*Coro* Laughing chorus climax
8	*Coro Stretta* Vendetta chorus	**8**	*Coro Stretta* Vendetta chorus

The act I tavern scene of *Grimes* features a drinking song or *brindisi*, an operatic form also found in *Macbeth*, *Otello* and *La traviata*. The *brindisi*, a set-piece strophic song, is used frequently by Verdi in the context of revelry. In *La traviata* act I it is Alfredo's *brindisi* that reinforces his love for the transient pleasures of Parisian entertainment and his willingness to please Violetta. In *Otello*, however, Iago's *brindisi*, again in act I, is far more integrated in the structure of the scene, as action weaves between the verses of the song to culminate in a vicious brawl. It is also an example of Verdi's typical mixture of frivolity and menace. While Iago sings his apparently good-natured song he is conspiring to get Cassio intoxicated and thus to provoke violence. A similar light-dark mixture is found in Lady Macbeth's *brindisi* in Macbeth act II. Here her 'trivial' song is intended to mask the visionary terrors of her husband who sees Banquo's ghost and relives the horrors of the murder he has just committed. The *brindisi* thus becomes a façade beneath which Macbeth's terrors fester.

After the entrance of Peter and his philosophical musings – 'Now the Great Bear and Pleiades'[41] – the Borough community gathered in the Boar mutter cruelly, 'he's mad or drunk!'[42] and the Nieces and Boles moralise about his conduct (act I scene ii). The gossip gradually builds in intensity until Peter's *fff* cry of 'Get out!'[43] as he thrusts Boles aside roughly. In order to keep the peace Balstrode calls for a drinking song. Britten's *brindisi* in E*b* is marked *con slancio!* Like Verdi's typically strophic construction, 'Old Joe has gone fishing' is a round begun by Keene leading to a huge climax for full chorus and cast at fig. 83. While the contours of the song may appear uncomplicated, the 7/4 time signature and the destabilising emphasis on the second beat of each bar mean that it is far more complex than it may at first appear. It is ostentatiously simple and at the same time sophisticated, and this distances it from Verdi's more 'seriously' popular moments, such as the Duke's 'Donna é mobile' in *Rigoletto*.

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[41] Benjamin Britten, *Peter Grimes*, p. 139.
[42] *Ibid.*, p. 142.
[43] *Ibid.*, p. 146.

However, Britten's use of the chorus in the wider opera is very different to Verdi's. While Verdi's upper-class chorus of courtiers in *Rigoletto* (act I) communicate decadent frivolity, the songs of Britten's working-class fisher-folk depict a rougher, harsher existence. The *Peter Grimes* chorus is thus closer to the choruses in *Nabucco*, *Don Carlos*, *La battaglia di Legnano*, *Simon Boccanegra* and *Aïda*, which involve a cross-section of society. Yet, unlike these examples the Borough chorus does not communicate idealistic ideas of nationhood and community:[44] when they sing together their refrains aim to *exclude* as much as to include.[45] Indeed, as discussed below, the communal force of the chorus is frequently revealed as a threat rather than an agent of positive cohesion.

Akin to the Macbeth *brindisi* the drinking-song is also a mask of disruption. Like Lady Macbeth's interjection with verses of her song to mask the horrors of Macbeth's hallucinations, Balstrode introduces the song to deflect attention from Peter, although with benevolent rather than sinister intentions. As at this moment of vocal solidarity Peter is conspicuously absent, however, it subtly provokes his further alienation. Even in moments of fun, Peter is left out in the cold.

5. Laughter and *vendetta* choruses

Conspirators play a central role in a number of Verdian operas, including *Rigoletto* and *Un ballo in maschera*. In *Rigoletto* the cries of the conspirators are both jocular and macabre – *'zitti, zitti moviamo a vendetta'* ('silently, silently, our movement to revenge')[46] – becomes in Budden's terms a 'gleeful chorus'[47] and they recount their adventures to the Duke in act II – *'scurrendo uniti remoto vida'* ('at night in the secret and undetected')[48] – with jocular cruelty [Fig. 2.10].

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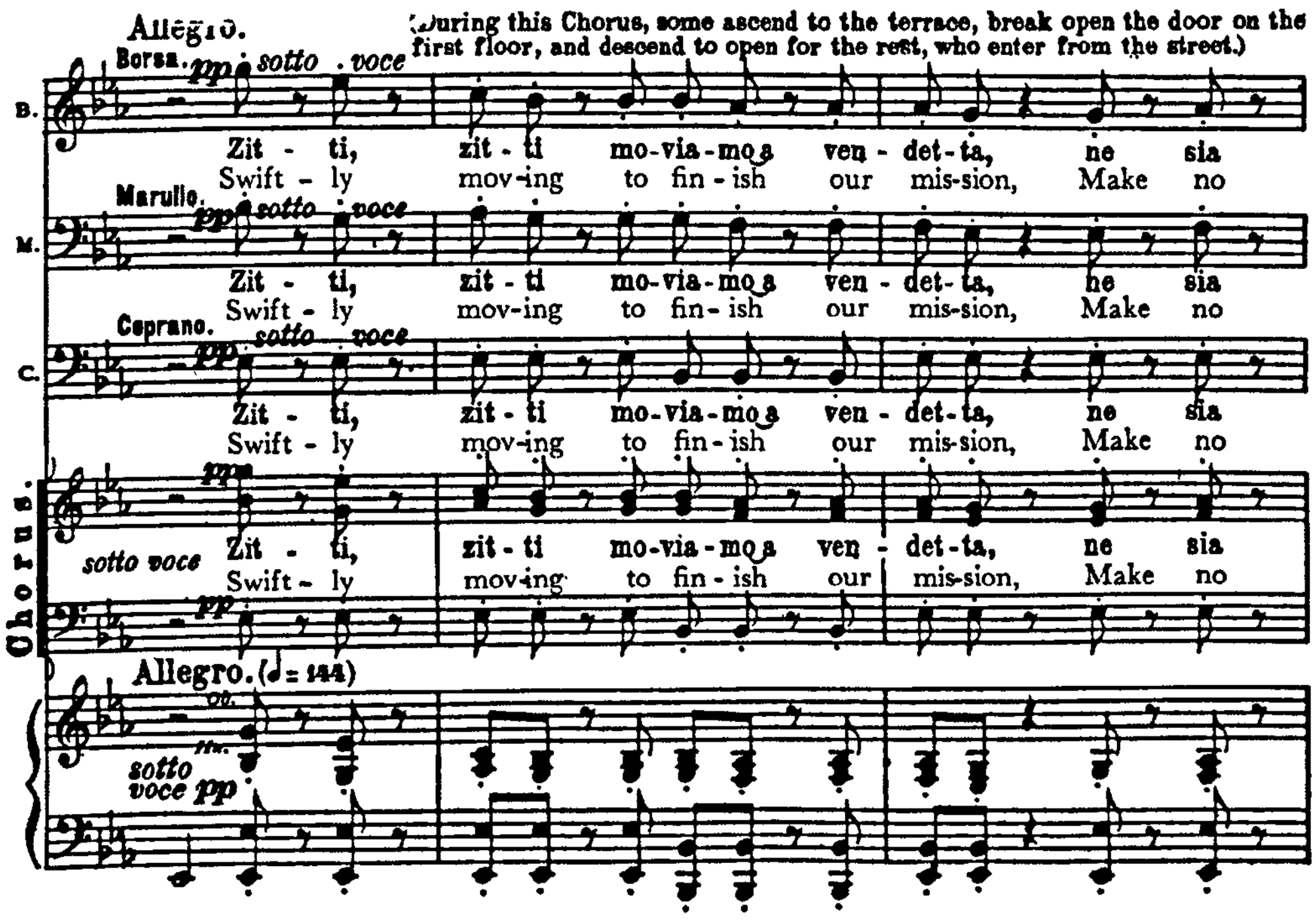
[44] James Parakilas, 'Political Representation and the Chorus in Nineteenth-Century Opera'.
[45] For example their muttering 'Talk of the devil' in act I scene ii prior to Grimes's 'Now the Great Bear and Pleiades'. *Ibid.*, p. 139.
[46] Giuseppe Verdi, *Rigoletto*, trans. Ruth and Thomas Martin, New York, G. Schirmer, 1957, p. 108.
[47] Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi*, Vol. 1, p. 477.
[48] Giuseppe Verdi, *Rigoletto*, p. 120.

Fig. 2.10 Laughing chorus, *Rigoletto*, act II no. 10, p. 108.

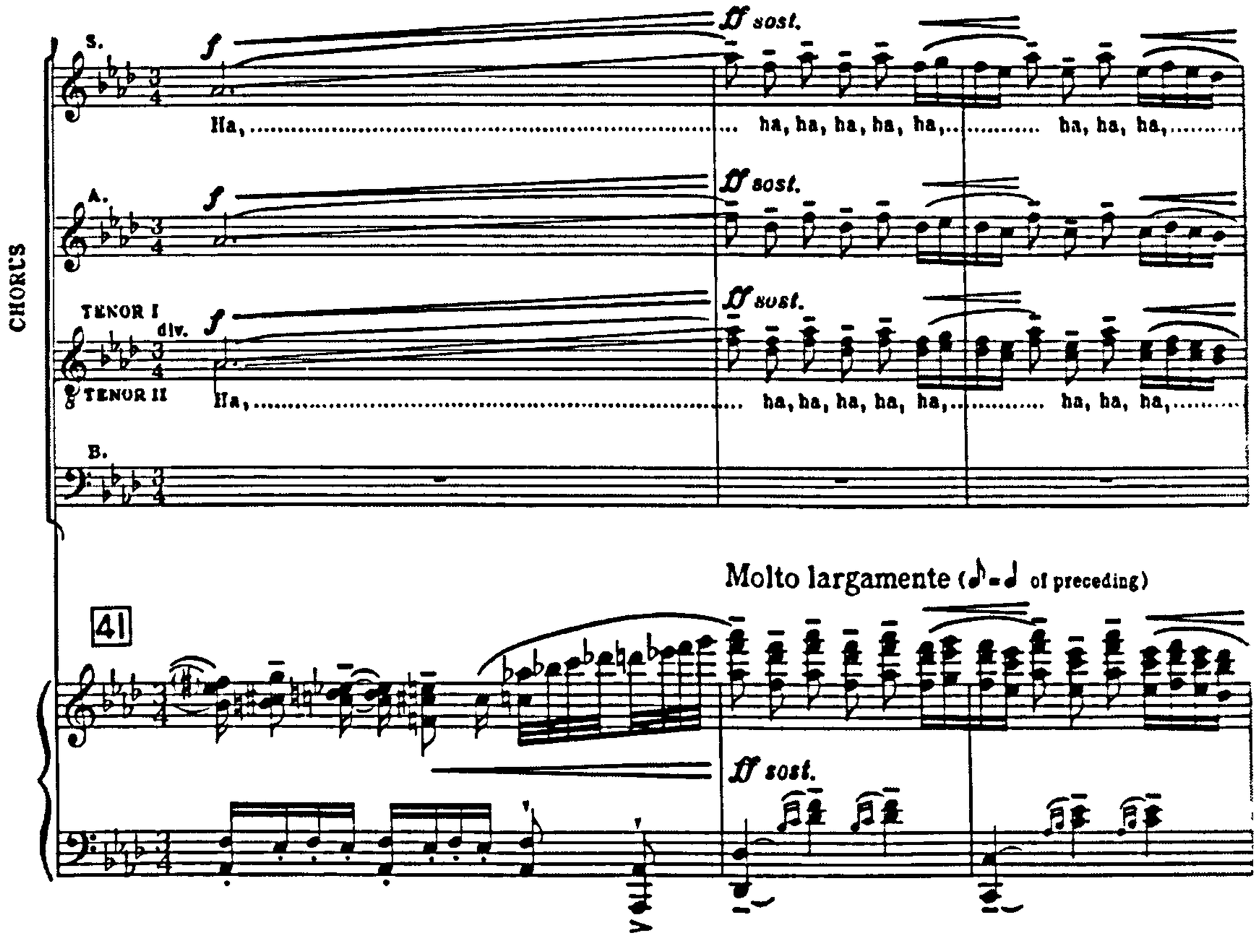


In *Un ballo* this mixture is emphasised still further in the act II 'laughing' chorus as the conspirators discover Renato with his wife. In contrast with more overtly threatening cries of vengeance, such as the chorus reaction to Alfredo's insult to Violetta in act II of *La traviata*, Verdi often brings laughter into moments of menace, tracing a thin line between light-hearted fun and cruel mockery.

In *Grimes* too, the Borough community – themselves conspirators against Peter – laugh. In act II scene i No. 4, their *concertato* culminates in a cruel laughing chorus. This leads to the search for Peter in his hut and an intense march scene 'Now is gossip put on trial',[49] as they mercilessly hunt down their victim. Even more cruelly, after the strains of the final dance in the Moot Hall fade away in act III scene i No. 4, a *concertato* again ensues involving a choral curse ('our curse shall fall on this evil day')[50] and cruel bursts of laughter before a ritual naming of their victim [Fig. 2.11].

[49] Benjamin Britten, *Peter Grimes*, p. 247.
[50] *Ibid.*, p. 341.

Fig. 2.11 Laughing chorus, *Peter Grimes*, act III scene I, p. 353.



These moments mark the trajectory of the tragedy, each time increasing in violence. By using laughter as a climax in two *concertati*, Britten invokes the Verdian models, but makes them even harsher. Indeed, this laughter with its powerful homophony is uttered with the diction of the emotive 'vendetta' in *La traviata*. Thus in *Grimes*, laughter is 'elevated' almost to the level of a curse, a sign of ultimate contempt.

By the time the townspeople reach Grimes' hut their hate-speech is such that we may imagine that they are close to killing Peter themselves in a feverish hunt to the death.[51] Britten thus transforms and exaggerates the ferocity of the 'conspirator' genre, giving it a new persecutory intensity. Moving beyond the passion even of Verdi's military choruses, this denotes a show of force of a much more personal and venomous kind. It is anger directed inwards to a member of their community, rather than outwards. As E. M. Forster notes, 'Crabbe's Peter is an embodiment of the dark

[51] Philip Rupprecht, *Britten's Musical Language*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 52-62.

side of an uncaring and morally enfeebled society, whereas Britten's is the victim of that society and a symbol of its oppression.'[52]

6. Peter's mad scene

With the cries of the chorus we return once again to the mad scene. Peter is abandoned and is losing his sanity. Like many Verdian *heroines*, he is left reeling, his thoughts a jumbled recollection of musical memories, misremembered fragments of his operatic past. There are some similarities between this moment and mad scenes for Macbeth and Otello, but we will focus first on its resonances with Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*.

The act III aria for Lucia in Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* is a quintessential example of the 'mad scene' genre, which stretches back through the roles of: Amina in *La sonnambula*, Imogen in *Il pirata*, Elvira in *I puritani*, Linda in *Linda di Chamounix* and Anna in *Anna Bolena*.[53] That Britten knew the opera is clear from his article about E. M. Forster's portrayal of the piece in his novel *Where Angels Fear to Tread*.[54] The scene, as many others, involves copious amounts of coloratura between Lucia's stanzas, abrupt changes of tempo, sudden tonal swerves and unaccompanied song, which have been interpreted as the flights of fancy of a disturbed mind, either denoting a need for liberation[55] or of attaining it through music.[56] In *Lucia* the structure of the aria is clear, but the utterance is fragmented, recalling Lucia's 'wedding theme', her love theme as well as describing the horrors of the murder she has just committed. Her state of delusion is underlined by her attentive reaction to the many piccolo flurries, symbolising birdsong, that punctuate the aria.

Peter's 'mad scene' is a far looser structure, consisting of *arioso*-like utterance, swathes of which are unaccompanied. Yet, like the mad scenes in *A Midsummer*

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[52] E. M. Forster, 'Two Essays on Crabbe' (given at the Aldeburgh Festival in 1948), *Benjamin Britten: Peter Grimes*, p. 2.
[53] Jonas Barish, 'Madness, Hallucination, and Sleepwalking', *Verdi's Macbeth: A Sourcebook*, ed. David Rosen and Andrew Porter, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984, p. 151.
[54] Paul Kildea (ed), *Britten on Music*, p. 317. 'Some Notes on Forster and Music' (1969).
[55] Catherine Clément, *Opera or the Undoing of Women*, trans. Betsy Wing, New York, I. B. Tauris Publishers, 1997, p. 88.
[56] Susan McClary, 'Excess and Frame: The Musical Representation of Mad Women', *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender & Sexuality*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2002, p. 84.

Night's Dream and *Curlew River*, it resonates with the musicalizations of madness described above. The fluidity of Peter's scene accentuates the 'stream of consciousness' nature of his musings and, like Lucia, he is haunted by themes he has heard previously, including fragments of the trial scene and 'Old Joe has gone fishing'. In an even more exaggerated way, however, his diction veers from tenderness to biting hatred, breaking the bounds of the form. And crucially, unlike the courtiers in *Lucia*, the chorus do not act as a constraining voice at the end of the aria, but send Peter further into madness: suggesting perhaps that it is society that is the cause of his mental disturbance. Intriguingly, he is also aligned with 'hysterical' characteristics, as Britten describes him as 'demented, hysterical' in the draft scenario of 1944.

This provokes the question: what is Britten striving for? If Lucia's song highlights a desperate attempt to wrest free from the shackles of social convention and gender stereotypes, is Peter, too, rebelling against society in this sense? Indeed, he appears to be rebelling on many levels: he is protesting against the corruption and cruelty of his community, he protests against his own nature in a vicious tussle between love and hate, and he may even be seen to be protesting against his own gender stereotype. If *Peter Grimes* is understood as an allegory of the homosexual condition Peter is stepping into Lucia's role of the marginalised in society, a twentieth-century version of the angst over sexuality.

If Peter takes a feminised role here, he also musically recalls the downfall of Macbeth and Otello, both of whom are haunted by their psyche. Macbeth's 'sword scene' in act II displays his deteriorating mental state as he attempts to deal with the murder he has just committed, and Otello loses his wits before the Venetian ambassadors, cruelly encouraged by Iago. These instances of madness, however, are both linked with guilt. It is because they have killed or plan to kill that they suffer from persecutory delusions. This brings into question Peter's guilt – is he persecuted by shame over his part in the previous deaths or by the fact that he was unable to 'save' the lives of the children in his care? This ambiguity is heightened in the mad scene as we are left with a fallen 'hero', but a fallen hero who equally may or may not be to blame for his demise.

Placing scenes from *Grimes* alongside moments from Verdian opera, thus, not only illuminates the pervasiveness of this strand of influence on Britten's musical thought, but sets off fruitful resonances and reverberations that inform interpretation of the work, bringing to the fore the central issues of Peter's societal persecution, sexuality and guilt. We find further complex layers of resonance, here, ranging from generic allusion to the 'number' opera tradition, Italian nineteenth-century opera and Verdian opera in general, to specific references to Verdi's works and direct modelling. Yet, it is what Britten does to challenge, deviate from and transform his allusions that tell most about his compositional individuality. In short, Britten's glances towards Verdian practice are perhaps most revealing when they challenge 'conventions' within the conventions themselves.

Chapter III

Comic Opera:
Echoes of *Falstaff* in *Albert Herring*

In a letter to Nancy Evans dated 10 February 1947 Eric Crozier, *Albert Herring*'s librettist, wrote somewhat testily:

> A long letter from Carl Ebert tonight – quite stupid – talking about act I of *Albert* [*Herring*] and how the production must express the "social criticism" of the comedy and the "mendacious prudery" of the characters. O God …! All so off the point … Now I must write a long letter back in words of one syllable, explaining that this isn't an Expressionist or Trotskyist attack on the upper classes of a decadent England, but a simple lyrical comedy.[1]

Apparently, Crozier's aim, and by implication Britten's too, was to write a good-natured, humorous work that poked fun at the idiosyncrasies of the Loxford community without seriously criticising it. Yet, not only does the premise of the plot rely on Albert's *rejection* of the village's social values, but the work's self-conscious use of language – and especially musical language – renders it a sophisticated critique of bourgeois society.

Albert Herring has many parallels with Verdi's *Falstaff*, which also draws its sparkling comedy from social critique, this time focusing on the Italian bourgeoisie. It seems to have been a direct precedent, too, as Crozier recalls:

> I remember that in Britten's bedroom at Snape during the composition of *Albert Herring* there was a full score of *Falstaff* on the bedside table, and about the same period when we were in a

[1] BPL: Evans-Crozier archive, box 7, 33/A-34C.

> shop that specialized in second hand scores & books BB bought me a miniature full score of the same work.[2]

Both operas focus on social morality: Verdi's on marriage and the follies of promiscuity, Britten's on the tension between societal ideals of 'purity' and individual freedom of expression. The works also share many characteristics with the wider comic opera genre, including farcically frivolous plots with quick-paced action, happy endings, colourful character pieces, and orchestral accompaniments that bubble with energy. That Britten was enthusiastic about farce is underlined by the fact that he especially appreciated the scene in *Falstaff* in which the 'hero' is thrown into the Thames.[3] Moreover, they both incorporate musical parody derived from self-reflective games with operatic utterance and a complex mixture of comic and tragic elements. The allusions to Verdi that Britten extends, transforms and parodies here, also point towards the far more 'critical' musical comedy that features in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

This chapter considers the role of the lovers (Sid and Nancy and Nannetta and Fenton), caricature, comic quotation, and musical 'games', before turning to the tragi-comedy of Britten's act III Threnody.

1. Sid and Nancy, Nannetta and Fenton: love and marriage in comic opera

In *Albert Herring*, Sid and Nancy are painted as a highly sentimental couple, revelling in youthful unbounded love. Their amorousness is matched by the lyricism of their music, which indulges in affective sixths and chains of thirds: signs of union and accord. In act I scene ii, Sid and Nancy talk outside Albert's shop. They are arranging a tryst for the coming night, the sensuality of their love symbolised by the peaches that they are saving for later: 'Flavour our kisses with a dash of peach bitters'.[4] Their *scena* conversation leads to a *con moto* lyrical passage, characterised by gentle triplet

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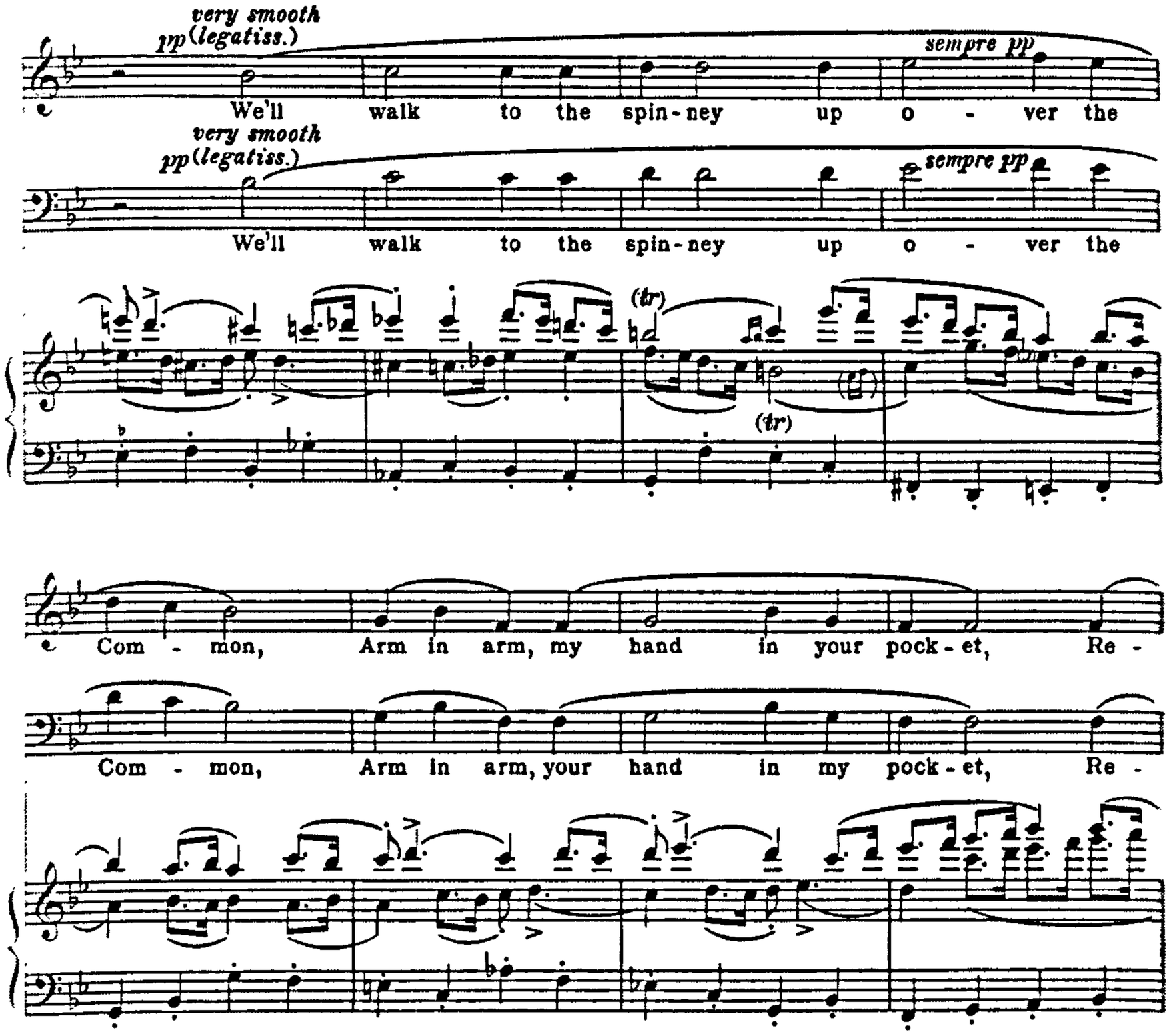
[2] *Ibid.* 'For his part Britten gave Crozier a copy of Boito's libretto for Verdi's *Falstaff* as an encouragement to, and a model for, his librettist, inscribed, "Eric, a present from Amsterdam, very confidently, Ben"'. Benjamin Britten, *Letters from a Life*, Vol. II, p. 249.

[3] The performance was at Covent Garden, in the 1950s, with de Sabata conducting and Stabile singing. Britten even wrote a note of appreciation to the conductor, which was very unusual for him. Conversation with Marion Thorpe, 18 May 2007.

[4] Benjamin Britten, *Albert Herring*, London, Boosey & Hawkes, 1947, p. 122.

figurations in which the pair sing alternate phrases in imitation before reaching a passage that burgeons into sensuous thirds at the close: 'I'll try to be there if I possibly can,/ For the night will be fine and clear'.[5] After a layered interjection from Albert (fearing that their 'whispering' will upset his mother) the lovers sing a *cavatina*,[6] their accord marked by an emphatic unison [Fig. 3.1].

Fig. 3.1 Sid and Nancy's love duet, *Albert Herring*, act I scene ii, p. 127.



The *cavatina* has three verses and takes the form A A' B. In the third verse the idiomatic strings of thirds return and Albert interjects again. This time, however, he is wistful: 'And I shall be sleeping alone in my attic!/ As they walk, her hand in his,/ refreshing themselves with the pleasures of love!'[7] This marks the beginning of Albert's self-questioning. In his subsequent aria he voices doubts about the validity of his mother's strict rules, adopted in the name of moral purity.

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[5] *Ibid.*, p. 125.
[6] *Ibid.*, p. 125.
[7] *Ibid.*, p. 128.

Comedy is introduced alongside this sentimentalism. Sid's and Nancy's loving exchange at the close of the *scena* is layered with an interjection from Albert who objects to their flirtations on account of his mother's views: 'I do wish they would clear right away from the shop .../ There'll be trouble I fear should my mother appear and discover them flirting here!'[8] The line is marked *pp* against the *poco a poco crescendo* of the lovers' contour and alternates between D and C#. The obsessive pitch repetition and hushed nature of the utterance accentuates the line within the texture and, due to Albert's status as an 'audience' to their actions (and their song), acts as a critical commentary on their love. However, he voices an adopted view, the sentiments of his mother, rather than his own. Thus, the gesture humorously emphasises the ridiculousness of his mother's over-protectiveness and Albert's naivety. It also draws attention to the lovers' mode of discourse. Albert's knowing wink to the audience reveals the exaggerations of their conversation and even the overblown nature of their *musical* flirtatiousness; a sign of operatic self-consciousness. The scene ends with comedy as Sid and Nancy leave, still enraptured with each other, oblivious to Albert's 'Excuse me!'[9] as he demands payment for the herbs he has given them.

The lovers return in act II scene i to discuss the May King celebrations and Sid's plans for spiking Albert's lemonade with rum. The first of their meetings includes a *racconto* from Nancy concerning the state of the May Day preparations followed by a tense *scena*.[10] Act II scene ii provides another love duet,[11] consisting of a *scena* and *cavatina*, with a verse from Sid followed by a verse for them both (with much florid imitation), leading once again to a unison convergence at the climax: 'Time is a glutton, time is a thief, / Youth must challenge him as he flies,/ Daring and sharing its dreams of delight'.[12] The sentimental lyricism of their music is all the more obvious for its contrast with the fractured backdrop, which fizzes with caricature and humour. Again Albert emerges from the shadows, moved by, and fearful of, the implications of the couple's belief in the power of love and their brave recklessness.

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[8] *Ibid.*, p. 125.
[9] *Ibid.*, p. 129.
[10] *Ibid.*, p. 171.
[11] *Ibid.*, p. 260.
[12] *Ibid.*, p. 267.

In many respects Sid and Nancy share their dramatic status with Nannetta and Fenton in Verdi's *Falstaff*. Not only are both couples lovers, but also secondary characters that inform the central action. (Britten, of course, alludes here to the wider comic opera genre (especially *opera buffa*) as well as to *Falstaff* in particular.) Verdi, too, paints the amorousness of their relationship with musical signs of accord. In act I, after Meg and Alice have received fake love letters from Falstaff, Nannetta and Fenton greet each other.[13] Just like Sid and Nancy they move from gasps of delight in a passionate *scena* – *'Taci. Che voi? Due baci. In fretta'* ('Quiet. It's you? Two kisses. In haste')[14] – to a lyrical *cavatina* in A*b*. Moreover, as in *Albert Herring*, their conversation is hurried and interrupted, due to the presence of other characters. Once the conspirators have laid their plans for Falstaff, the pair are left alone again and their lyricism continues with imitated phrases, characterised by triplets, leading to a climax unison: *'come fa la luna'* ('as the moon does')[15] [Fig. 3.2]. In act III scene ii, in the wood, Nannetta and Fenton meet again.[16] This time Fenton sings a love theme and Nannetta joins in at the conclusion. Moreover, just like Albert's interruptions outside the shop, Alice enters soon afterwards with a hood and mask ready for their fairy deception. This is comic, too, due to the self-consciousness of the gesture. They are observed in a double sense: by Alice and by the audience; the theatricality underlined by the introduction of the 'costumes' on stage. This moment of 'distancing' disrupts our involvement with the lovers, challenging for a moment our suspension of disbelief, allowing us to perceive the artifice of their talk.

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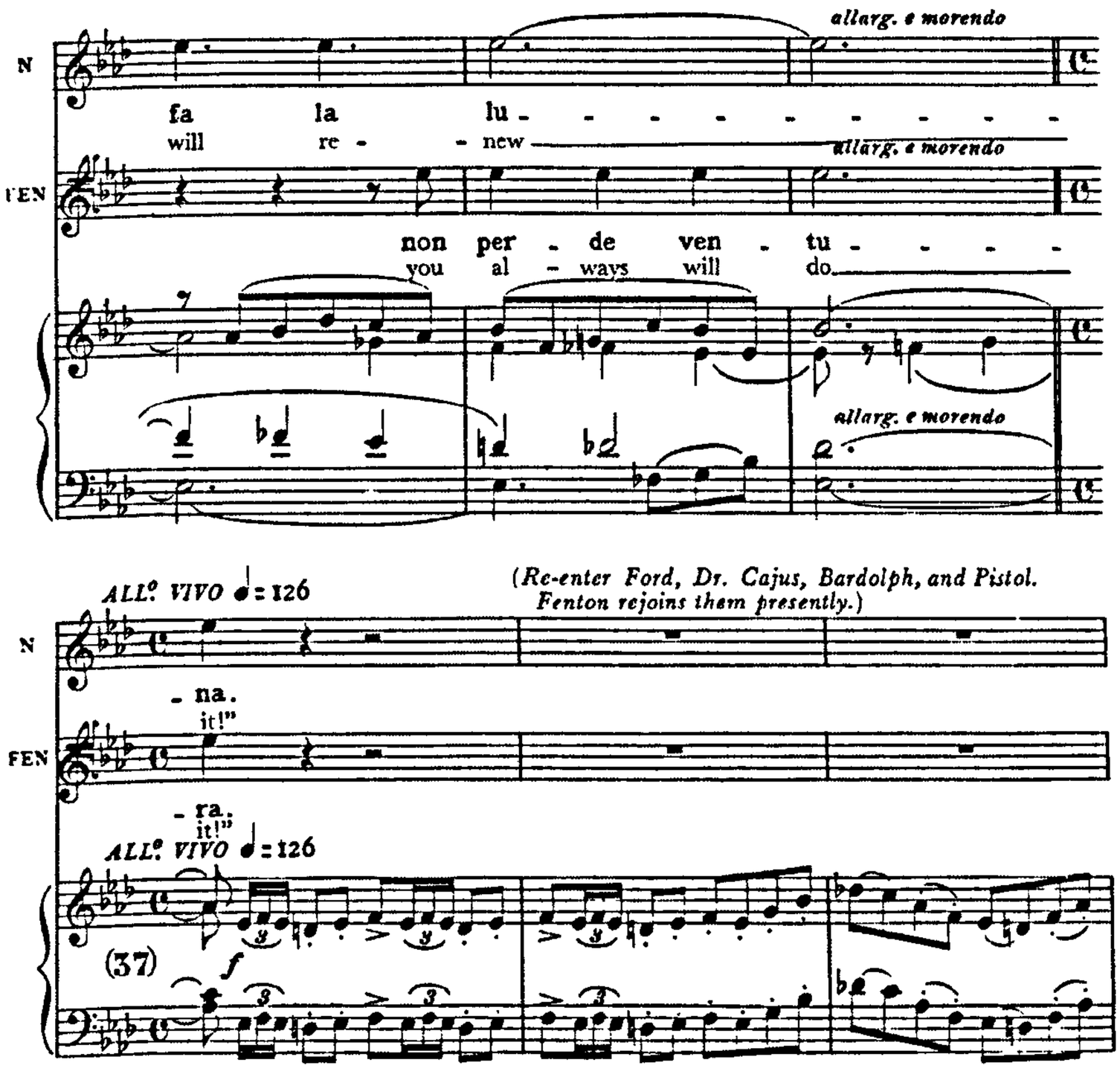
[13] Giuseppe Verdi, *Falstaff*, trans. Walter Dulcoux, New York, G. Schirmer, 1963, p. 83.
[14] *Ibid.*, p. 83.
[15] *Ibid.*, p. 100.
[16] *Ibid.*, p. 332.

Fig. 3.2 Nannetta and Fenton's love duet, *Falstaff*, act I scene i, p. 100.



However, while the signs of accord that colour the musical language of the two pairs of lovers are similar, Britten's writing is far more chromatic, as underlined by the complex tonal shifts in the accompaniment to the *cavatina* of their second love duet.[17] Moreover, their overall dramatic function is extremely different. The Verdi/Shakespeare sub-plot highlights the trials of love and ends with marriage after the working through of societal opposition (in this case the objections of Nannetta's father) – the usual conclusion of the comic genre – whereas the Britten/Maupassant sub-plot fails to confirm Sid's and Nancy's relationship in marriage. Indeed, Britten and Crozier changed the original *tragic* ending to Maupassant's story, which leads to Isidore's lonely death, to a comic one: Albert is allowed a moment of liberation and returns to the village at the close. Yet, this ending leaves many loose threads.

[17] Benjamin Britten, *Albert Herring*, pp. 126-9.

Comedy frequently rests upon a dramatic trajectory from the tension – and therefore humour – of societal discord and the happy ending that leads to its release.[18] As Alexander Leggatt notes: 'Laughter is not a solution, it is a sign of the problem ... there is a built-in contradiction between comedy's two purposes, laughter and the happy ending.'[19] In *Albert Herring* the social tension that the comedy addresses is not that between love and society, but between freedom and societal expectation. In other words, it is about the possibility of Albert's personal liberation. (This liberation, as Clifford Hindley argues, may well be read as a veiled allusion to Albert's status as a homosexual.)[20] And although Albert is accepted by Sid and Nancy and the children at the end of the work, we are shown no evidence of him blending into the wider community. Thus, in *Albert Herring* the tension remains to the end in two senses: the lovers don't marry and Albert's status within the community is called into question. Although there is partial acceptance there is no true closure. The ending thus brings with it increased realism – it doesn't succumb to the cliché of a conventionally 'happy' ending – but also a disquieting sense of non-resolution. And it is not necessarily a tension that prompts laughter. We are left to question exactly what Albert has discovered and exactly how he can (if he can) integrate with the villagers that raised him. Indeed, this is a sign that the work is not only comic, but that it contains a darker, more challenging view of bourgeoisie society, and definitely some 'social criticism'.[21]

2. Comic character and caricature

Britten and Crozier's use of comic character archetypes, however, tips the balance back towards light-hearted fun.[22] Albert's comic status is marked by his non-conformity, and in this respect he is the archetypal 'loner': 'We laugh ... not at immorality but at unsociability'.[23] At the beginning of the opera Albert is perceived as funny because he is more naïve and moral than his surroundings, limiting his

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[18] Alexander Leggatt, *English Stage Comedy 1490-1990: Five Centuries of a Genre*, London, Routledge, 1998, p. 4.
[19] *Ibid.*, p. 4.
[20] Clifford Hindley, 'Not the Marrying Kind: Britten's "Albert Herring"', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 1994, pp. 159-174.
[21] BPL: Evans-Crozier archive, box 7, 33/A-34C.
[22] 'One might even call it a burlesque of grand opera ... Stock figures of domestic farce.' *The Stage*, 26 June 1947.
[23] Alexander Leggatt, *English Stage Comedy 1490-1990*, p. 58.

integration with people of his own age group, represented by the children and Sid and Nancy. By the time the opera ends, though, he has become more like them at the expense of respect from the older generation. He swaps allegiances, and yet remains a 'loner' without finding true acceptance. (Once again this has serious as well as comic implications.) Sid, however, is a 'trickster', directing the play's laughter.[24] When he puts alcohol in Albert's lemonade at the party he does so with a knowing wink towards the audience. Moreover, Albert's mother is a stock comic parental figure. As Leggatt notes:

> It is one of the well-worn conventions of comedy, and of theorizing about comedy, that parental authority is not a source of stability or comfort but an obstacle to overcome … If fathers have a quasi-political authority, mothers have control at a physical, sexual level. Refusing to let their sons grow up these blocking mothers deny the renewal of life.[25]

These stereotypes are mediated by Britten's individual musical characterisation and through Crozier's very 'human' text.

It is to the portrayal of Loxford 'society' that we now turn. Writing on the opera's 10th anniversary Joan Cross asserted that *Albert Herring* is an extremely detailed evocation of British village life:

> I can remember those days. As a child I lived in a village where we had annual flower shows, church Bazaars, and Fêtes. I can remember my mamma raging against, or sometimes approving, the decisions of local committees. I remember the agonies of starched Swiss embroidery, shiny sashes sliding, pants and forget-me-nots, hats clamped under the chin by an elastic which dug in deeply, leaving a painful mark.[26]

(This is an apt metaphor, perhaps, for the uncomfortable social truths of village life.) One of the most striking *musical* portrayals of the community is achieved through the strings of character-study *ariosi* in acts I and II, although this aspect of the score received some criticism from Glock in an early review:

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[24] *Ibid.*, p. 68.
[25] *Ibid.*, p. 97.
[26] BPL: Evans-Crozier archive, box 7, 33/A-34/C.

> *Albert* Herring would be a better opera if it were half an hour shorter. The material is spun out to an impossible length. One reason for this is that Britten cannot resist exercising his extraordinary gift for characterisation. If the situation gives him the smallest excuse for painting a few portraits, even of people who have sat for him only forty minutes earlier, he will get out his easel and hold up the action until he has finished.[27]

In act I scene i the village notables are introduced as they visit the house of Lady Billows. Their meeting begins with a 'ritualised' greeting scene – 'good morning'[28] – which renders the scene immediately comic due to the number of repetitions of this banal phrase. Britten is also self-ironic here as the 'good night' scene in *The Rape of Lucretia* (act I scene ii) is equally ritualised, although the spacing of the phrases is more subtle. (As we shall see, this is not the only instance of the parody of elements used seriously in Britten's previous opera.) The greeting is followed by 'mock' grand homophony as the Loxford committee set out their intentions for the selection of the May Queen. In context, such grandeur appears out of proportion with their small-village concerns. This leads to a long and fluid *scena*, including a string of *ariosi* [Fig. 3.3]:

Fig. 3.3 Character *ariosi*, *Albert Herring*, act I scene i.

Act I scene i No. 5	29	*Scena* All 'Now then! Note book, Florence!'	*Lively*	Nominations for the May King are discussed and dismissed
	30	*Arioso* Lady Billows 'May Queen! May Queen!'		
	36	*Scena* All 'The first suggestion on my list'		
	51	*Recitative* All 'Oh bitter, bitter is the fruit'	*Lamenting*	No-one is found
	51	*Arioso* Lady Billows (with interjections from Florence) 'Is this all you can bring?'	*Quick and agitated*	Lady Billows' fury

[27] William Glock, *Time & Tide*, 28 June 1947.
[28] Benjamin Britten, *Albert Herring*, p. 22.

60	*Recitative* Superintendent 'Beggin' your pardon'		
63	*Arioso* Superintendent 'Albert Herring's clean as new mown hay'	*Very quick*	Albert is suggested
64	*Scena* All 'I know the boy you mean, but is he quite?'		
68	*Arioso* Vicar 'Virtue, says Holy Writ, is Virtue'	*Easily moving*	Albert's virtue is praised
72	*Scena – concertato* All 'Right! We'll have him' – 'On the First of May'	*Very quick and vigorous*	The decision is made

Verdi's *Falstaff* also includes chains of character pieces, particularly in act I scene i. His librettist Arrigio Boito stated that his aim was to 'sketch the characters with a few lines ... extracting all the juice from the enormous Shakespearean pomegranate, allowing the useless seeds to slip into the glass.'[29] Verdi's musicalisation of the scene is similarly colourful and succinct, and consists of a *ritornello* (a *ff* orchestral flourish followed by punctuated quavers) that weaves through the scene alongside the much-observed 'sonata form' structure [Fig. 3.4].[30] The first emphatic orchestral gesture occurs eight times characterising Dr Caius' mounting agitation and contrasting with Falstaff's comic 'serenity'.[31] This musical illustration of Dr Caius' impatient movements becomes the *gestos* of the scene.

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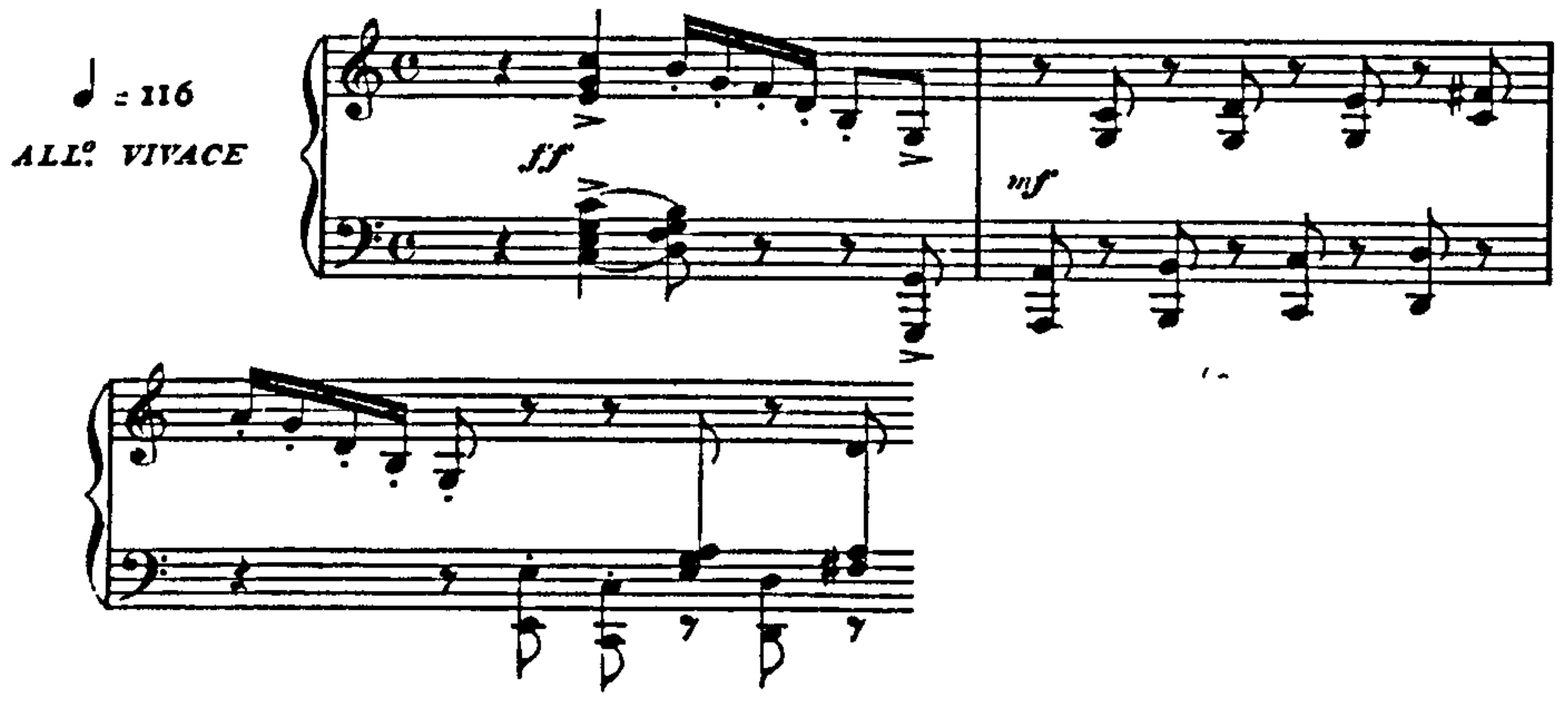
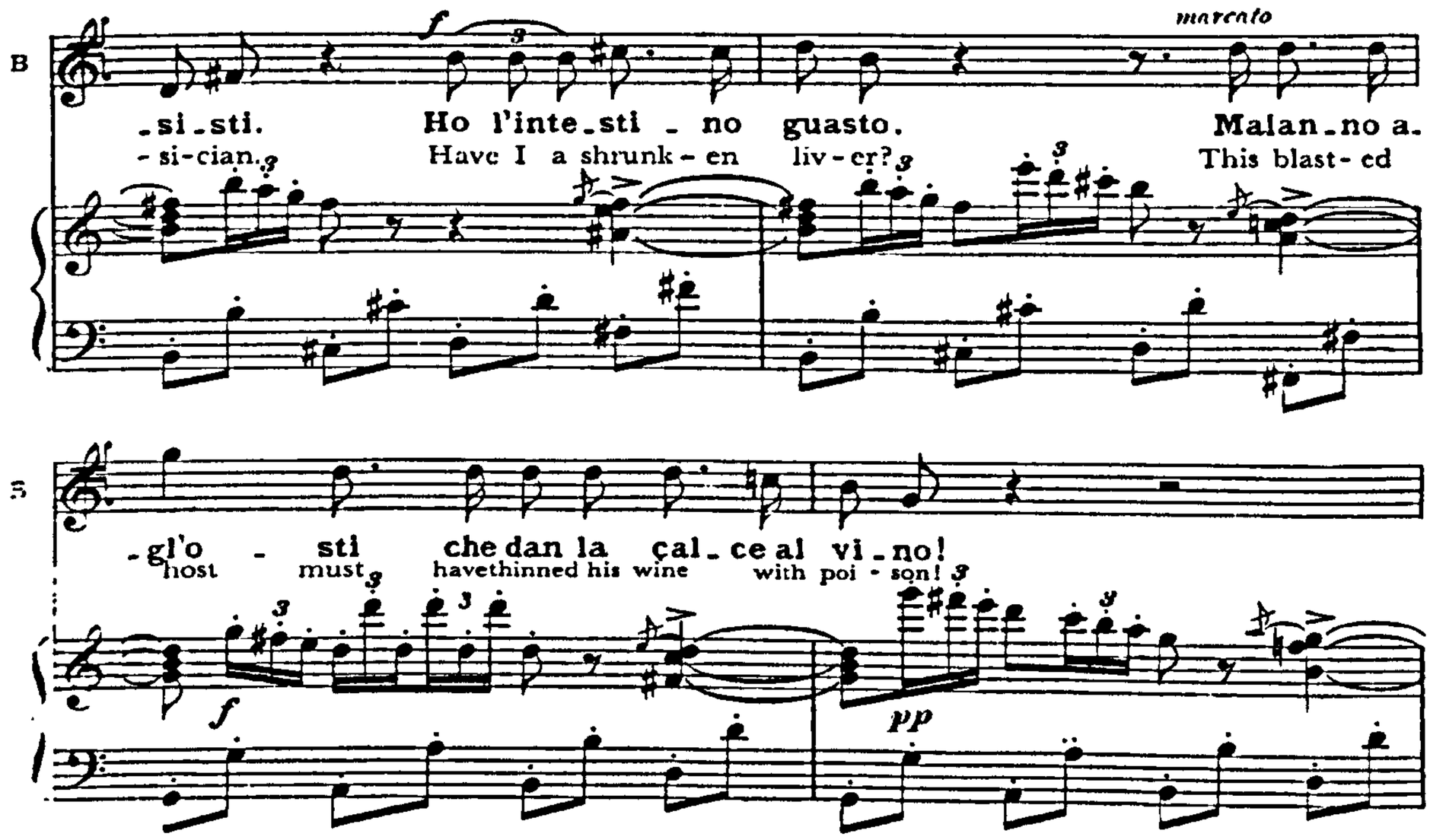
[29] *The Verdi-Boito Correspondence*, ed. Marcello Conati and Mario Medici, trans. William Weaver, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1994, p. 150.
[30] Roger Parker, 'Falstaff and Verdi's Final Naratives', *Leonora's Last Act: Essays in Verdian Discourse*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1997, p. 112.
[31] Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi*, Vol. 3, p. 446.

Fig. 3.4 The Doctor Caius motif, *Falstaff*, act I scene i p.1.



Between these recurrences of the full motif the gesture is fragmented, reduced to a figure, spun into a continuous line, and interwoven with contrasting motifs that match the sentiment of the 'conversation' – for example, the dotted descending figure that accompanies Dr Caius's sarcastic *'troppa grazia!'* ('Many thanks!)[32] when Falstaff confesses that he broke into his room. Orchestral motifs are also associated with particular characters, such as the skipping triplet semiquaver patterns that accompany Bardolfo's speech, which become exaggerated when he feigns illness when it is time to pay the bill [Fig. 3.5].

Fig. 3.5 Skipping triplet orchestral motif, *Falstaff*, act I scene i, p. 7

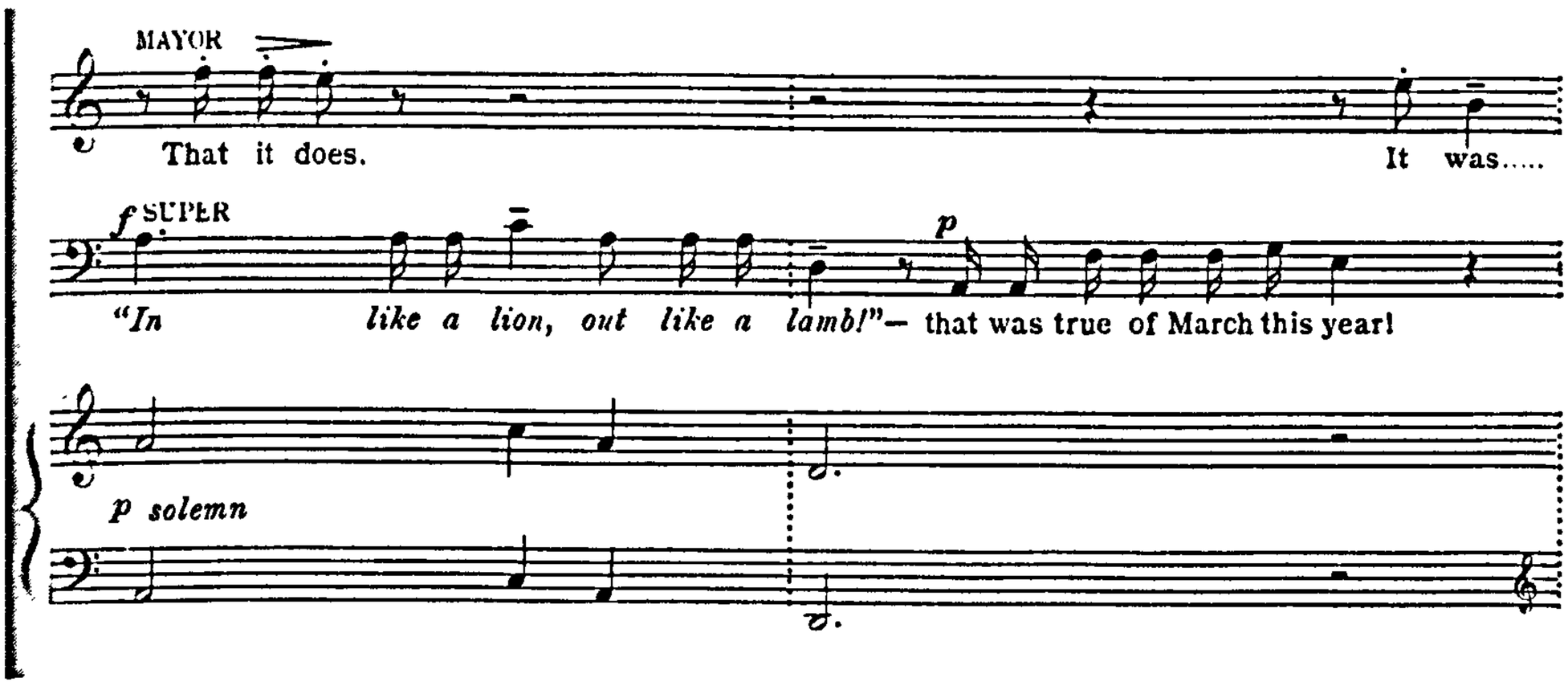


[32] Giuseppe Verdi, *Falstaff*, p. 3.

This pattern grows out of the previous elaboration of the Dr Caius motif, creating a sense of unity in diversity. Moreover, the shifting affects of the drama are underlined by the accompaniment. When Falstaff, Pistol and Bardolfo conjecture about who may have stolen Dr Caius's money, a *legatissimo pp* rising motif reinforces the suspense of the vocal exchange that layers above it.

In *Albert Herring*, similar orchestral gestures are introduced, but their use is more fractured and there is no *ritornello* organisation of the scene.[33] Here, their exchanges are accompanied by sparse orchestral textures, in particular spread chords. For the Superintendent's quotation – "in like a lion, out like a lamb"[34] – Britten includes a solemn hymn-like contour in octaves to underline the sentiment, a gesture of mock-profundity [Fig. 3.6].

Fig. 3.6 Hymn-like accompaniment to the Superintendent's quotation, *Albert Herring*, act I scene i, p. 15.



Moreover, swathes of the *scena* are unaccompanied, emphasising the complex interaction of the vocal lines.

While the alternation of conversation with set-pieces reflects Verdi's construction of the act I of *Falstaff*, the *ariosi* are far more clearly differentiated from the

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[33] Indeed, Imogen Holst recognised the association between Britten's handling of the orchestra and Verdi's in a letter to Jim Butt on 19 April 1952: 'How I wish we could have been in Vienna together ... I was THRILLED with Verdi's Falstaff, which I'd never heard before! I suppose it ought to be in Italian really, but oh I enjoyed it so much, and I realised for the first time how much Ben owes to him. There are orchestral bits which are just as funny to listen to as the comic instrumental bits in A. Herring!' BPL: Imogen Holst correspondence archive.

[34] Benjamin Britten, *Albert Herring*, p. 15.

surrounding material, reflecting earlier Verdian practice. For example, Lady Billows' entrance is marked by a move from C to D centrality, a 4/4 time signature, and the introduction of regal double-dotted patterns.[35] The exaggerated 'heaviness' of this accompaniment becomes a caricature of itself. Britten thus introduces his characters through allusion to Verdian structural techniques and accompanimental textures, but extends them, creating a far more diverse collage of *arioso* fragments.

A similarly extended *arioso* chain occurs during the speeches at the May Day dinner in act I scene i [Fig. 3.7].

Fig. 3.7 Character *ariosi*, *Albert Herring*, act I scene i.

197	*Scena* Vicar 'Your Ladyship! Ladies and gentlemen'		The Vicar's introduction
197	*Arioso* Lady Billows 'Thank you, thank you, Mister Gedge!'		Lady Billows: opening speech
205	*Arioso* Mayor 'As representing our local council'	*Very quick*	Mayor's speech
210	*Arioso* Miss Wordsworth 'My heart leaps up with joy'	*Gently moving*	
214	*Arioso* Superintendent 'Er-humph! Er-humph!'	*Moderate but with spirit*	
217	*Scena/ concertato* All, Albert 'Go on, Albert!'	*Very moderate*	Albert's (drunken) 'speech'
224	*Scena* Vicar 'Albert the Good!'		The Vicar makes a toast
231	*Scena* All 'That's better! Thirsty!'		Albert gets hiccups
239	Interlude		Orchestral scene-setting

[35] *Ibid.*, p. 20.

The scenes are supported by extremely flexible accompanimental patterns and characteristic flourishes from the orchestra, while the speeches themselves are closed forms. Albert's hiccups are also witty, as the music here is wryly mimetic.

Moreover, the colloquial nature of the text in *Herring* contributes to the quirky characterisation. Britten suggests that this was a particularly appealing and challenging aspect of the project:

> [I]t is extremely exciting to set everyday language, to try and cope with the problem of setting things like "well, come and serve me. I'm in a hurry ..." – trying to find a musical equivalent for it. This is a fascinating problem and a thing I've always wanted to do.[36]

However, this language was sharply criticised:

> It is not really as witty as all that: much of Mr Crozier's wit belongs to the world of village theatricals, and Mr Britten's wit consists chiefly of imitating amusingly the inflections of everyday speech or setting commonplace remarks to burlesque recitative – a joke of long service in the 'halls'.[37]

Furthermore, in *Albert Herring* each character is represented by allusion to a different 'foreign' vocal style: Lady Billows adopts Handelian rhetoric, the Vicar and Miss Wordsworth allude to nineteenth-century popular music, the Mayor sings in the style of Italian opera, and the Police Superintendent's music is redolent of brass bands.[38] Thus, ironically, as well as alluding to Verdian process, Britten caricatures Italianate utterance in the *arioso* speech of the Mayor.[39] His part in the act I scene i meeting already betrays his penchant for Italianate 'coloratura' with a florid *ff* rising scale to the words 'practical measures'[40] [Fig. 3. 8.] (This is also an ironic musical pun as the elaboration is far from 'practical'.) When he makes his nomination he talks in mock-Italianate recitative, marked *rapido* and *f subito*: 'There's Winifred Brown, who works in the town as assistant to Missus Bell'[41] [Fig. 3.9]. The style-quotation stands out in stark relief from the talk of the other characters and the obsessive pitch

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[36] Benjamin Britten, 'An Opera is Planned' (1947), *Britten on Music*, p. 71.
[37] Anonymous critic, 'Good Fun at Glyndebourne', 21 June 1947.
[38] Humphrey Carpenter, *Benjamin Britten: A Biography*, p. 245.
[39] Peter Evans, *The Music of Benjamin Britten*, p. 147.
[40] Benjamin Britten, *Albert Herring*, p. 19.
[41] *Ibid.*, p. 38.

repetition makes it an apt parody of Rossinian and early Verdian recitative; a sign of Italianate allusion subverted to comic ends.

Fig. 3.8 The Mayor's Italianate flourish, *Albert Herring*, act I scene i, p. 19.

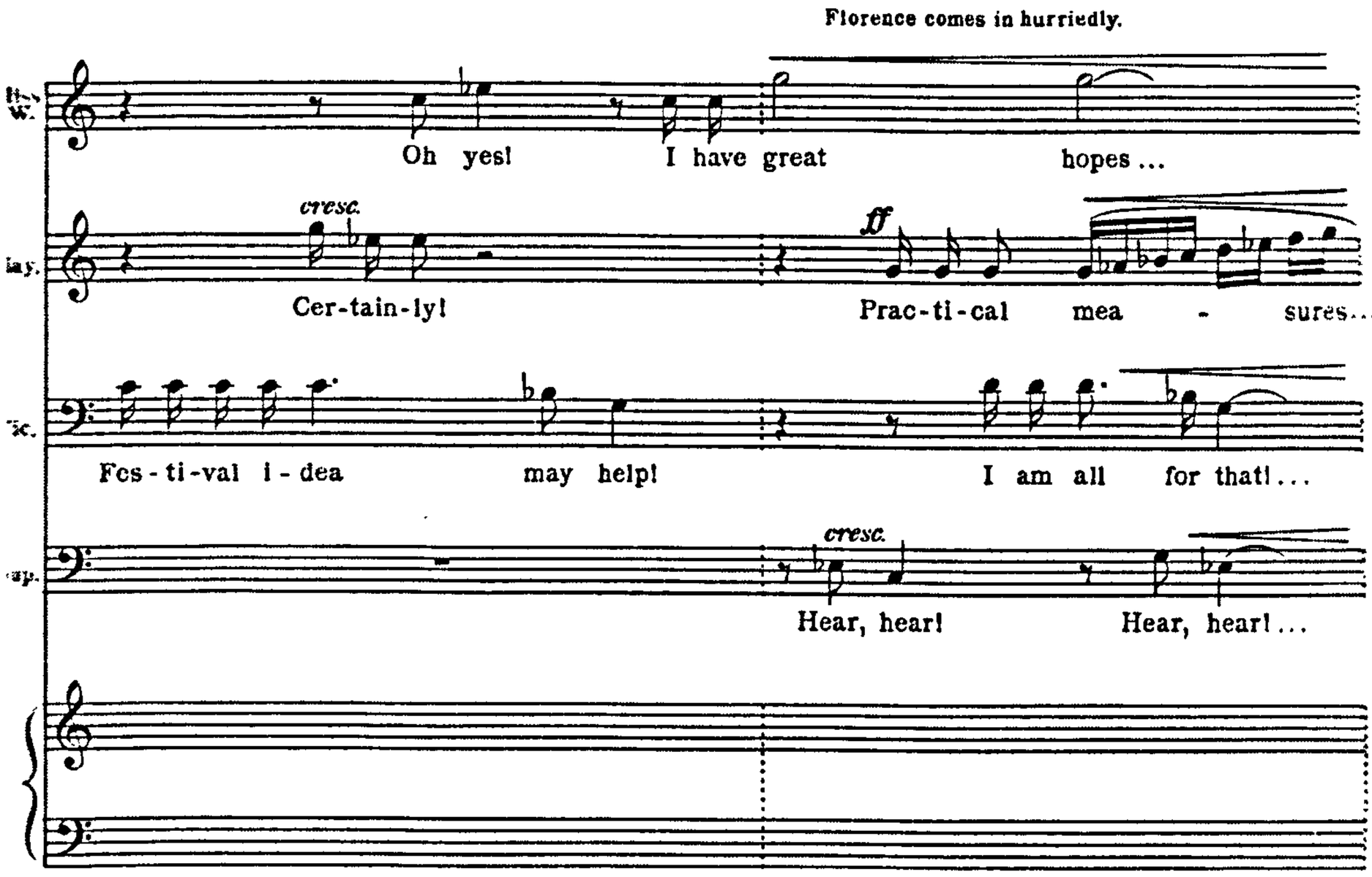
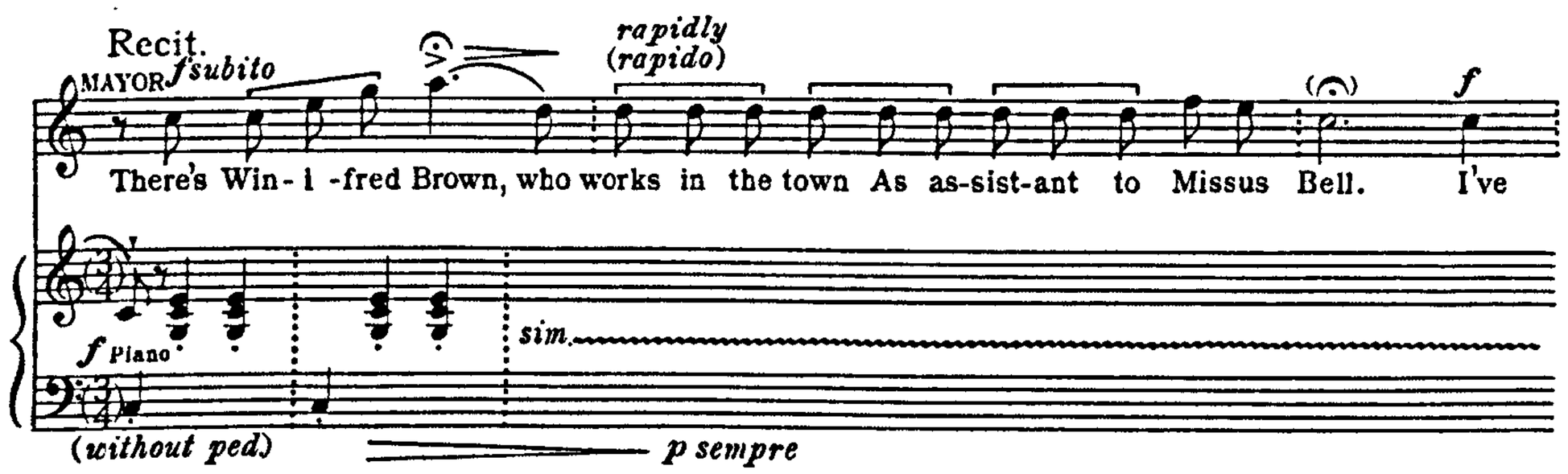


Fig. 3.9 The Mayor's Italianate *recitativo*, *Albert Herring*, act I scene i, p. 38.



Here, style allusion becomes parody, through obvious 'intertextual' reference characterised by *exaggeration* – the Mayor's overstated utterance is clearly differentiated from the language of the other characters and the surrounding material through its caricatured allusion to the Italian tradition. In Genette's terms, such overt references (in literature) are indicative of 'stylistic imitation aiming to critique ... or ridicule, an aim which is ... enunciated in the very style that it targets ... but remains on the most part implicit, leaving the reader to infer the parody from the caricatural

features of the imitation.'[42] The fact that Britten's musical 'imitation' is light-hearted is emphasised by means of clear comic subversion – excessively florid coloratura and insistent pitch repetitions.

As Linda Hutcheon underlines, such parody may suggest anything from ridicule to homage, due to the double entomology of the word, meaning both 'contra' and 'beside'.[43] It is 'a form of imitation, but imitation characterized by ironic inversion, not always at the expense of the parodied text'.[44] In other words, musical parody may both 'deflate' the importance of its models and elevate them. In this work, Britten incorporates Italianate references and simultaneously distances himself from them, displaying a distinct ambivalence towards his models.

This parody technique comes to the fore again during the May King celebrations in act II scene i, where the Mayor is called to give a speech. Once again his utterance consists of *recitativo*, but this time he is reading, which constricts his range to just one note: a repetition of E in A major, aptly marked 'automatic'. However, this repression of floridity does not last long and at the words 'your ladyship'[45] he launches into an elaborately ingratiating turn, marked *con espressione*, with a lingering pause at its conclusion. As he digresses, to reminisce about the heroic actions of the authorities when repairing a water main, elaboration again erupts to emphasise the words 'from infections'.[46] This comical *parola scenica*, falling on the highest note of the *arioso* arch (high A), produces a stumbling emphasis and, paradoxically, accentuates the banality of his speech. Repetition is also a point of humour as the gathered company mis-predict the number of his florid utterances of 'well done'. They join in at the wrong moment and are subsequently cut off in mid-flow by the resumption of his speech.[47] Furthermore, in the act III threnody (discussed below) his heroic tenor utterance comes to the fore once again at 'we shall see his like no more'[48] with its

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[42] Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, p. 20.
[43] Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms*, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 2000, p. 53.
[44] *Ibid.*, p. 6.
[45] Benjamin Britten, *Albert Herring*, p. 206
[46] *Ibid.*, p. 207
[47] *Ibid.*, p. 209
[48] *Ibid.*, p. 324

violent swell to *ff* and rapid ascent. The dotted 'regality' of 'he died, he died too young'[49] similarly emerges from the homogeneous texture.

In contrast, as already mentioned, Lady Billows music alludes to the Baroque coloratura style. As Crozier observes:

> In the speech that opens the May Day Feast, Lady Billows launches into song on a grand scale, covering a Fiordiligi-like range. "The cadenza filled me with cold terror just to look at (Joan Cross confesses later): it staggered from well below the stave to sickeningly high above it in just a few bars." Lady Billows's heart is so full, she gets so carried away that at the climax she becomes almost incoherent and races on from one patriotic cliché to another without ever stopping to finish.[50]

The reference to *Così fan tutte* is particularly significant as Crozier also recalls thinking of Mozart's opera when proposing Maupassant's story as a possible opera:

> I recalled the performances that had been staged at S. W. [Sadler's Wells] in 1944 of Mozart's *Cosi fan tutte*, with Peter Pears as a delightful witty Ferrando, Joan Cross outstanding as Fiordiligi & Margaret Ritchie as an enchanting Dorabella … Memories of these performances and also of Peter Pears as Vasek in *The Bartered Bride*, suggested a story to me – Madame Husson's May King.[51]

This is an indication of the many contrary 'influences' that weave through the opera, in addition to Verdi, which may be expanded to include Donizetti's *Don Pasquale* and Rossini's *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*.

Style quotation as a means of comedy is also a feature of *Falstaff*. For example, Bardolph and Pistol adopt a Baroque 'sacred' style for their mocking 'Amen' in act I scene i.[52] Here, they tease Dr Caius about his self-righteous pronouncements in mock-ecclesiastical language. They chant 'grotesquely' and appear to be *actually* singing as

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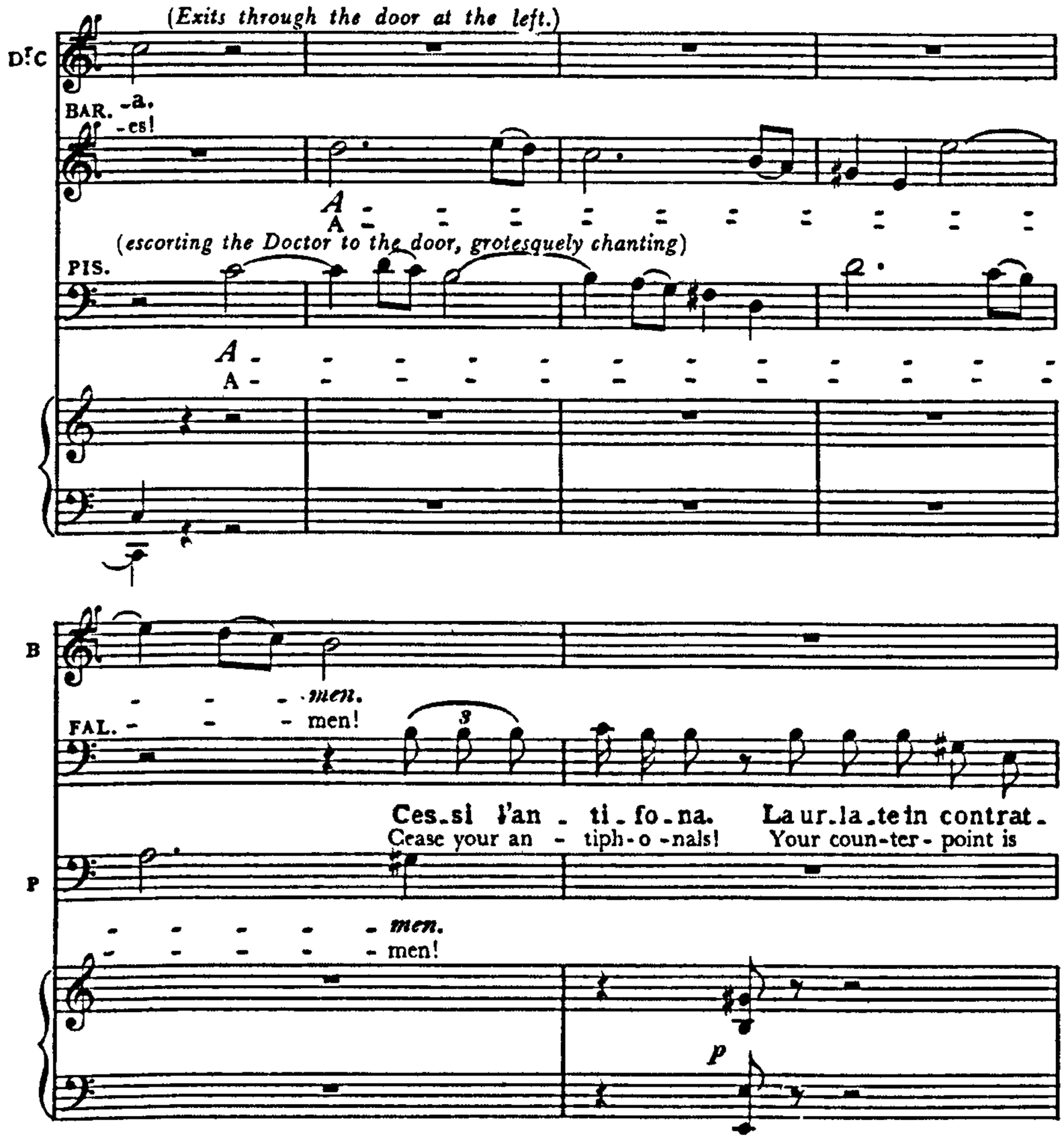
[49] *Ibid.*, p. 335.
[50] Eric Crozier, 'Albert the Good!', draft 'Forward' for a proposed recording of *Albert Herring* in 1964, p. 4. BPL, Evans-Crozier Archive, Box 7, 33/A-34/C.
[51] *Ibid.*, p. 7
[52] Giuseppe Verdi, *Falstaff*, p. 16.

Falstaff notes: *'Cessi l'antifona. La urlate in contra tempo'* ('Cease your antiphonals! Your cry is out of time')[53] [Fig. 3.10].

Fig. 3.10 Mock-sacred quotation, *Falstaff*, act I scene i, p. 16.



The difference here, however, is that while Verdi's style quotation is a highlighted by the *diegetic* context and its clear contrast with the characters' usual 'speech', Britten paints the eclecticism of the society *through* light-hearted style allusion.

Furthermore, the character exaggeration present in *Herring* appears to be a continuation of the exaggeration intrinsic to the melodramatic genre. As Gilles de Van notes: 'The truth of drama was conveyed by means of artifice since the aesthetics of melodrama ... presupposed exaggerated effects, characters that were larger than life and emphatic gestures.'[54] Brett maintains that the work does not rely on caricature, as

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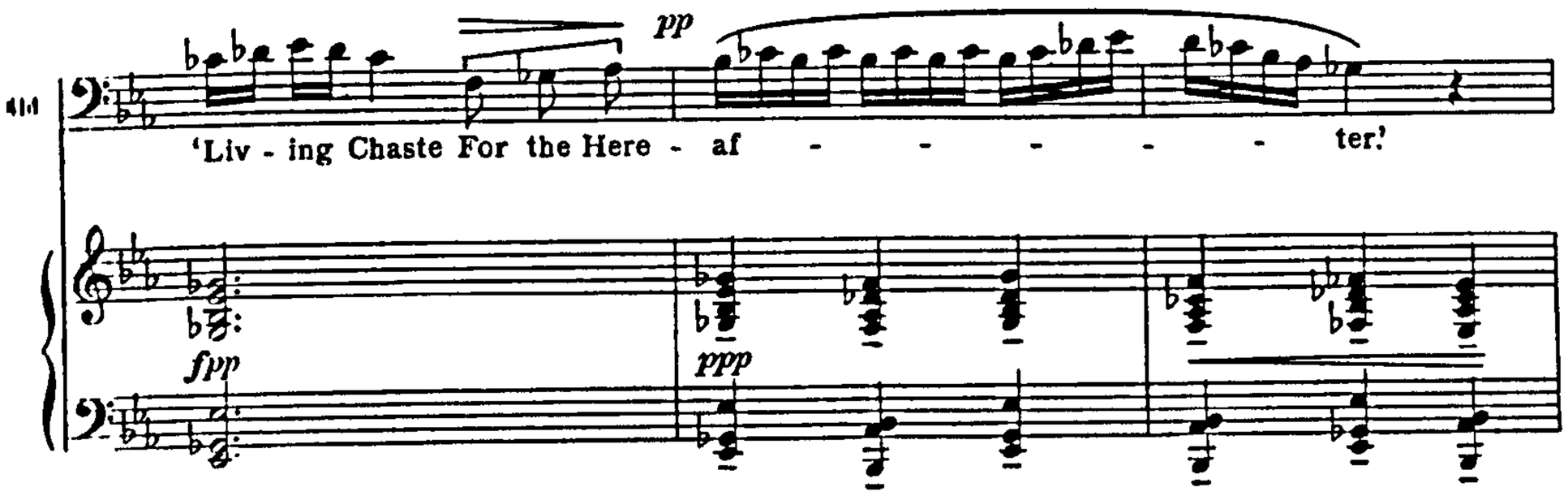
[53] *Ibid.*, p. 16
[54] Gilles de Van, *Verdi's Theatre: Creating Drama Through Music*, p. 85.

there are many humanising elements in the portrayal of the characters.[55] However, to recognise the exaggerations of their speech is not to exclude the possibility of depth.

3. Comic quotation and music-within-music

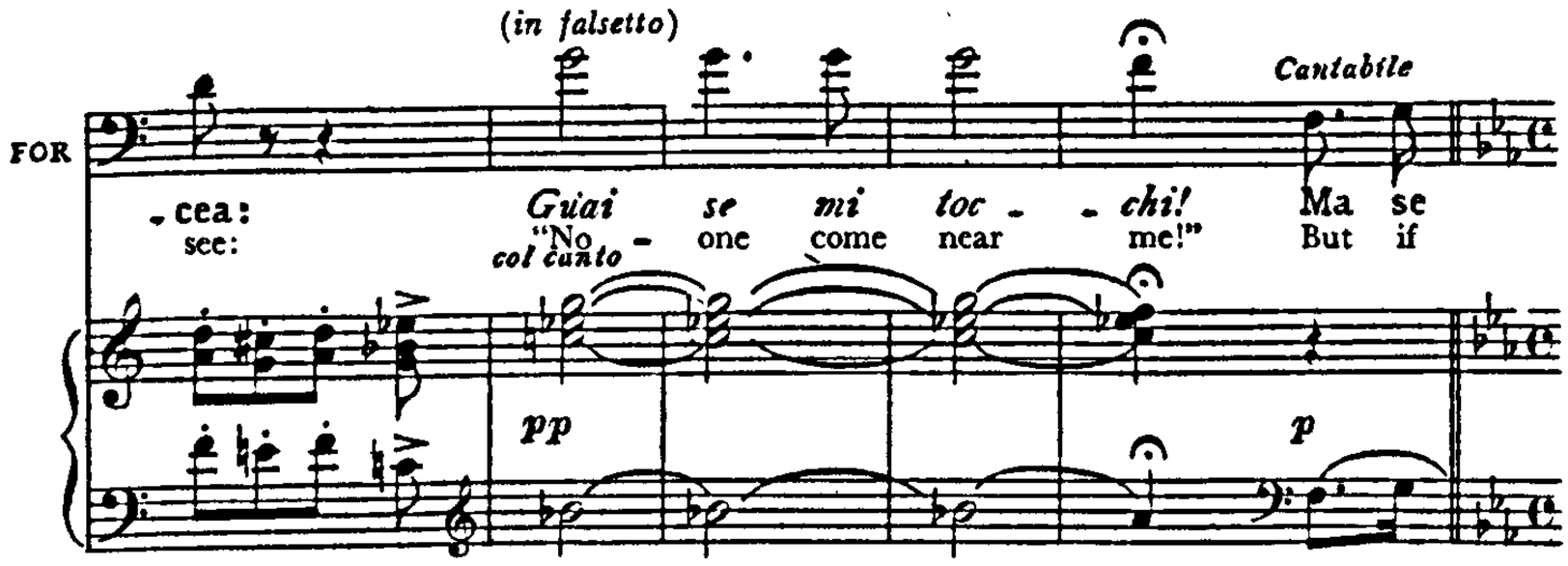
The tendency towards caricature is re-doubled when characters imitate each other, resulting in a further magnification of the idiosyncrasies of their vocal utterance. For example, the Vicar is impersonated by Sid as he quotes from the church service: 'The Vicar is preaching on "Living Chaste For the Hereafter"'[56] [Fig. 3.11].

Fig. 3.11 Sid's impersonation of the Vicar, *Albert Herring*, act II scene i, p. 171.



This is ironic partly due to the character impersonation and partly due to the humorous juxtaposition between this pronouncement and Sid's and Nancy's own liberal moral convictions. In a similar way, Falstaff, talks with Mr Ford and impersonates Mrs Ford in *falsetto*[57] [Fig. 3.12].

Fig. 3.12 Falstaff's impersonation of Mrs Ford, *Falstaff*, act II scene i, p. 168.



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[55] Philip Brett, 'Character and Caricature in "Albert Herring"', *The Musical Times*, Vol. 127, No. 1723, 1989, pp. 545-547.
[56] Benjamin Britten, *Albert Herring*, p. 171.
[57] Giuseppe Verdi, *Falstaff*, p. 168.

Here, the gender ambiguity of the *falsetto* utterance jars humorously with Falstaff's clear sexuality (and promiscuous intentions). While Britten includes detailed impersonation, Verdi includes a reference to feminine utterance *in general* through (unnatural) allusion to the female vocal range. There is nothing to suggest that this is an imitation of Mrs Ford in particular. He thus plays with gender symbolism, rather than specific character allusion. As well as mockery, these impersonations suggest something deeper about operatic utterance: Verdi and (even more) Britten play not only with sung exaggeration of speech, but sung exaggeration of song, in a self-conscious acknowledgement of opera's inherent artifice.

This self-consciousness of musical language is further explored by Britten through quotation. The ceremony in act II is laced through with the 'love potion' motif from Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*. The significance of this quotation is discussed in detail by Robert Bledsoe and is highly ironic, as the musical symbol of transcendence is here completely subverted.[58] The motif is first introduced just prior to the arrival of the guests as Nancy and Sid pour the lemonade: 'Just loosen him up and make him feel bright. / I think that's all right. / Now add lemonade.'[59] The quotation returns after the speeches when a toast is being offered to Lady Billows.[60] The ascending chromaticism rises up and up in a grotesque and extended version of the theme. Albert then dissolves into hiccups, an extreme subversion of the seriousness of the Wagnerian symbolism. As David Metzer notes, such quotations retain their 'cultural meaning' inside a surrounding text and set up a powerful dialectic with the remainder of the work.[61] (Arguably, the allusions to the Italian tradition and Verdi, too, suggest wider cultural resonance, here, as a result of caricature.) The incongruence of the style of this quotation contributes to its humour. The scene with the lemonade also resonates with a more deadly instance in Verdi's *Luisa Miller*, where lemonade, this time laced with poison, is prepared for Luisa by Wurm.

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[58] Robert Tevell Bledsoe, 'Chastity and Darkness in *Albert Herring*', *Mosaic*, Vol. 18, No. 4, 1985, p. 128.
[59] Benjamin Britten, *Albert Herring*, p. 184.
[60] *Ibid.*, p. 230.
[61] David Metzer, *Quotation and Cultural Meaning in Twentieth-Century Music*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 10.

Moreover, Britten quotes his own music: the 'Lucretia motif' from *The Rape of Lucretia*. In act II, during the search for Albert who is presumed dead, the Police Superintendent talks ironically of 'a criminal case of rape!'[62] which is preceded by a quotation of the motif in the orchestra.

A song rehearsal takes place in the build-up to the May Day ceremony and it is here that Britten's musical self-reflectivity reaches a greater intensity. This scene, too, as Crozier observes, has Wagnerian resonance:

> How many operas, I wonder, besides Albert Herring – and *Die Meistersinger* – include the rehearsal and the performance of a specially-written song?[63]

However, the reference to the *Meistersinger* song, a symbol of artistic progress and yearning passion, jars ironically with the amateurish, patriotic and highly banal strains of the school choir lead by Miss Wordsworth.

The scene begins with Miss Wordsworth's scurrying instructions for the children to pay attention. The children, however, are less than interested in the song they are about to rehearse and are instead mesmerised by the food on the tables for the celebration, whispering about jelly and blancmange. After some digressions Miss Wordsworth sounds her pitch-pipe and beats a bar of 2/2, but again the children are distracted by the food. At last they begin the song, but Miss Wordsworth stops them almost immediately as they sing *ff con forza*. After comedy about diction comes comedy about pronunciation. 'Not "'ail" sings Miss Wordsworth, but "hail"'.[64] She humorously accentuates this by adding a grace note to the word, repeated to the point of hilarity.[65] The final recurrence of the song (with imitation this time) is rendered comic through Harry's struggles to keep up, after which he is reduced to a desperate *ff* *Sprechstimme* on a single note. In the 'performance' before the guests the diegesis of the moment is emphasised by the bell orchestration. Repetitions in the vocal line and the accompaniment make it knowingly 'simple'. The crucial word 'hail' is also achieved *sf*, and there are no mistakes.

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[62] Benjamin Britten, *Albert Herring*, p. 299.
[63] Eric Crozier, 'Albert the Good!' BPL: Evans-Crozier archive, box 7, 33/A-34/C.
[64] Benjamin Britten, *Albert Herring*, p. 179-180.
[65] *Ibid.*, p. 181.

As well as being a comic spectacle, the rehearsal is music about music. It draws attention to the medium of song itself, the way in which it is performed, the meaning that it possesses. Although song rehearsals don't occur in *Falstaff*, Mrs Ford's serenade is also diegetic music accompanied by a lute on stage (also paralleling the lute songs in *Gloriana*). Moreover, prior to the arrival of Falstaff in their house – ready to be fooled – Meg suggests that 'now the comedy will begin', implying not only that what ensues will be comic, but that it may be interpreted in a theatrical sense. Furthermore, in the woodland scene the mock-spirits and fairies sing a fake 'incantation' and there are discussions of costume and theatre. These moments feature self-awareness: they are fleeting glimpses of the characters' knowledge of their status as actors, of singers aware that they are singing. And this awareness is accentuated and extended by Britten.

4. Musical games

Britten was enormously fond of playing musical games. In *Herring* this playfulness extends to the ball-games of the children Ciss, Emmie and Harry. (In keeping with Britten's affection for children, Bridget Slater suggests that it was her childhood games with him that were the beginning of the song 'Bounce me high, bounce me low'.)[66] The game introduces act I and the words are cruelly changed later when Albert is scolded by his mother. A third occurrence appears at the very end of the opera, simultaneously suggesting the children's continued acceptance of Albert but also the difference in magnitude between his first 'sin' and his latest quest for freedom. In this way it brings into question Albert's ability to slip back into ordinary life, the repetition of the same song emphasising his very different psychological and social position. The song plays with dotted rhythms and giggling rests, and the claps interjecting the 2/4 theme are in 3/4 time. Furthermore, like Verdi in the final fugue in *Falstaff*, Britten plays with form: the fugal finale to act I – 'May King' – is a mixture of a learned fugue and oom-pah march.[67]

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[66] John Bridcut, *Britten's Children*, London, Faber & Faber, 2006, p. 176.
[67] Peter Evans, *The Music of Benjamin Britten*, p. 160.

5. The tragicomedy of Britten's *Threnody*

When Albert is reported missing, the village begins a wild hunt for him. The police are called and uproar ensues. It is during this confusion, described in a light-footed *scena*, that Albert's May King wreath is discovered, battered and discoloured, on the road. In response, the community sing a 'Threnody', a powerful 'wailing' song in honour of Albert's supposed death. The Threnody begins with a grave *lento*, with homophonic utterance of 'In the midst of life is death'.[68] Homophony soon gives way to *concertato* as characters step out of the homogeneous background to provide solo passages that lace through the texture. The slow build-up leads to a *ff animato* passage and a key shift from D*b* to F major, and on to a section in B*b* with emphatic utterance and ninth leaps.[69] Then, with no warning, the shop bell rings and in comes Albert. The surprise forms the revelation that ends the work.

This injection of the tragic, which is then disrupted by the comedy of Albert's return, disturbed many early critics who interpreted the moment as cruel emotional manipulation. Donald Mitchell, too, explores this generic mixture, comparing the wailing of the Madwoman in *Curlew River* with that of Albert's mother.[70] The disturbing impression may be due to the musical language here, which has affinity with the wailing, desperate lament of the Mother in *Curlew River*. Indeed, it calls into question the audience's trust in the affect of the music presented to them. Short quotations or obvious parodies and satires are distinguishable from the fabric of the piece in a way that fore-warns that they may be false, alerting us to a more objective involvement by creating critical distance for their effect. Here, however, the long lament draws us in, the passion is intense and we are truly fooled – which may leave an uncomfortable feeling that the last laugh is with Britten. This is heightened by the fact that the audience are not in collusion with Albert – we know that he has left to reinvent himself but we don't know that he is safe. Unlike Nannetta and Fenton behind the screen in *Falstaff* during the enactment of Falstaff's humiliation in the washing basket (their concealment visible to the audience), here, knowledge is knowingly withheld.

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[68] Benjamin Britten, *Albert Herring*, p. 318.
[69] *Ibid.*, p. 388.
[70] Donald Mitchell, 'The Serious Comedy of *Albert Herring*', *Cradles of the New*, ed. Mervyn Cooke, London, Faber & Faber, 1995, pp. 352-64.

The tragi-comic genre was an important part of Verdi's aesthetic, stemming from his admiration of Shakespeare's mixed genres.[71] The clash of the jocular and the macabre, for example, in the drinking song of Lady Macbeth,[72] or Rigoletto's jesting song at court in an attempt to hide his grief over the loss of his daughter,[73] are two poignant examples. Yet, while in *Falstaff*, too, the final act threads a thin line between comedy and victimisation, it finally comes to rest on the comic side of the divide. The ending of *Herring* is not so clear cut: there is frivolity, but there is a suggestion that it is cloaking a continuing unease.

It is, thus, the various levels of self-criticism and self-reflexivity in both libretto and music that contribute to *Albert Herring*'s humour and also its more searching, even troubling, impression. Here, Britten's music comments on *itself* through multi-layered and eclectic intertextuality, with reference to the wider Italian opera tradition, Handelian rhetoric, English hymns, Wagner's *Tristan* motif, and even his own work. He thus simultaneously alludes to Verdian comic devices *and* parodies their source as homage gives way to critique and musical 'play'. In short, it is a 'comedy' full of lyricism that is anything but 'simple'.

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[71] Piero Weiss, 'Verdi and the Fusion of Genres', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, Vol. 35, No. 1, 1982, pp. 138-156.
[72] Giuseppe Verdi, *Macbeth*, trans. Walter Dulcoux, New York, G. Schirmer, 1969, act II, finale 2, p. 134.
[73] Giuseppe Verdi, *Rigoletto*, act III, no. 11, p. 138.

Chapter IV

Billy Budd: Verdian 'Assimilation'

From the parody and subversion of Verdian utterance in *Albert Herring*, we turn to the most Italianate of all Britten's operas: *Billy Budd.* Here, structural generic allusions as well as direct modelling come to the fore. Moreover, despite complex transformations, the depth of Verdian thinking means that Britten gets closest in this work to his ideal of 'assimilation'. This chapter is arranged in seven main sections: (1) *Billy Budd*'s structural relationship with Verdian *convenzioni*; (2) *racconto* and *scena e romanza* forms; (3) rituals, curses and fate; (4) the parallels between Claggart and Iago from *Otello*; (5) aria forms; (6) ensembles; and (7) 'popular song', the chorus and tonal design.

1. *Billy Budd*: scheme of acts and numbers

Appendix VII is a representation of the four-act version of *Billy Budd* divided into acts and numbers in the manner of a 'middle period' Verdian opera. It refers to the score published by Boosey and Hawkes, London, in 1951. This edition was subsequently revised and published in two acts in 1961. It seems that 'historical' considerations,[1] including Peter Pears's technical difficulty with the 'muster scene' (act I finale) and a disparaging review by Ernest Newman,[2] as well as purely aesthetic ones prompted the revision.[3]

The first column indicates the 'real-time' duration of each section, with the timings of each complete act given in bold. These timings are taken from the Hallé

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[1] Philip Reed, 'The 1960 Revisions: A Two-act *Billy Budd*', *Cambridge Opera Handbook: Billy Budd*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp. 74-84.
[2] Benjamin Britten, *Letters from a Life*, Vol. II, pp. 696-697.
[3] Benjamin Britten, 'Discussion on Billy Budd' (1960), *Britten on Music*, p. 203.

recording of the 1951 version.[4] Interestingly, the lengths of each act decreases until the final act, which is at the same time the shortest and the most highly-charged (33.26, 27.05, 24.48, 24.18).

The second column refers to the divisions of act and scene as they appear in the 1951 score. The numbers are added in accordance with nineteenth-century operatic precedents and are based directly on the musical divisions found in the *Ricordi* editions of Verdi's middle- and late-period operas, including *Rigoletto* (1851), *La traviata* (1853) and *Otello* (1887). In this table, as in the Verdian scores, a 'number' indicates a definable musical span usually (but not necessarily) involving a fixed set of characters (except in chorus scenes and finales where members of the ship's crew move on- and off-stage) heralded by an orchestral 'scene-change'. Moreover, the text, tempo, key and accompaniment pattern of these 'numbers' reinforce the sense of musical and dramatic 'unity.' (As will be explored below, however, many of these divisions are far from distinct, due to Britten's subtle 'art of transition' derived from Wagnerian models.) The return of *ritornello* themes is numbered (see, especially act I no. 1 and act III no. 1c) and roman numerals placed after the numbers indicate large-scale correspondences between non-adjacent sections. For example, the *prologo* (no. 0i) is coupled structurally, as well as dramatically, tonally, and thematically with the *epilogo* (no. 0ii), forming a narrative *scena e romanza*, with the *romanza* emerging only in the *epilogo*, that literally 'surrounds' the main action.

The third column indicates the page numbers as they appear in the 1951 version of the score. However, page numbers in italics indicate those in the most readily available edition (Boosey & Hawkes, 1961).

The fourth column describes the structure of each number. The musical type (*aria*, *duetto*, *quartetto*, *coro*, *concertato*) and the main characters are marked in bold. Beneath these headings, the sub-sections of each number are described, again using Verdian precedents (*scena*, *cavatina*, *tempo di mezzo*, *cabaletta* and so on). As will be considered below, the application of these structural conventions in Verdian

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[4] Benjamin Britten, *Billy Budd: Opera in Four Acts*, Hallé Orchestra and Choir conducted by Kent Nagano, Paris, Erato Disques, 1998.

repertoire, based on Basevi's writings (and defended by Harold Powers)[5] is not without contention.[6] However, recognition of the affective tensions between these ideal forms and their transformations (as argued by Hepokoski)[7] allows for a rich exploration of Verdi's works and, in turn, affords a fascinating insight into Britten's structural decisions in *Billy Budd*. Generic descriptions are also added here, including prayer (*preghiera*), narration (*racconto*), combat (*combattimento*), lullaby (*ninna-nanna*) and call-and-response (*richiamo e risposta*). Examples of Britten's adaptations of Verdian structures are also noted, including large chain-structures (here described as *catena*) with their *ritornello* themes (act I, no. 1 and act III, no. 1), fused aria and duet forms (act III, scene ii, no. 3), and aria structures that involve many characters, rather than a single protagonist (act III, scene ii, no. 4). For clarity, the first line of the text of each new section or sub-section is also marked.

The fifth column consists of tempo indications. These show not only the large-scale pacing of the work and the musical character of each 'number', but the delineation of the Verdian types described above. For example, the *cabaletta* is typically written in a fast tempo and the *cavatina* in a slow one – *andante* or *largo*. Moreover, there is a general *accelerando* towards faster tempi at the close of each number and, on a larger-scale, towards the close of each act. In this respect the sudden and unexpected tempo reversal from *allegro* to *largo* that accompanies the enigmatic interview chords at the end of act III is particularly affecting. Large-scale structural interpretation is also added here in bold. The pacing of the first act reflects a broadly symphonic design (first movement, slow movement, scherzo, finale) and the third act begins with a large intensification arch (*Steigerung*) peaking twice before a rapid dissolution.[8]

Furthermore, the *prologo* and *epilogo* suggest the beginning and end of a parable. The sixth and final column explores the epic nature of the opera and its dramatic intent still further. Just as many of Verdi's operas, including *La traviata* (originally titled

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[5] Harold S. Powers, '"La solita forma" and "The Uses of Convention"', *Acta Musicologica*, pp. 65-90.
[6] Roger Parker, '"Insolite Forme," or Basevi's Garden Path', *Leonora's Last Act: Essays in Verdian Discourse*.
[7] James A. Hepokoski, 'Genre and Content in Mid-century Verdi: "Addio, del passato" (*La traviata*, Act III)', in *Cambridge Opera Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 1989, pp. 249-76.
[8] Christopher Wintle, 'Was ist Steigerung? (What Intensification Means)', *Tijdschrift voor Muziektheorie*, Vol. 8, No. 2, 2003, pp. 102-111.

'amore e morte' ('love and death')) fall into epic sections, so too (in a more detailed way) does *Billy Budd*. Significantly, it appears that similar scene descriptions formed the basis of Britten's, E. M. Forster's and Eric Crozier's drafts of the libretto structure in 1948-49.[9] The pervasive Christian iconography also suggests parallels between Billy Budd's hanging and Christ's Passion. Dramatic references to the 'Temptation', the 'Eucharist', the 'Stages of the Cross' and the 'Crucifixion', are therefore added in bold.

[9] BPL, ID: 2-9100356.

2. Verdian *racconto* and *scena e romanza* forms

In a recorded interview with E. M. Forster and Eric Crozier in 1960, Britten notes 'that it was the quality of conflict in Vere's mind... which attracted [him] to the subject'[10] of Herman Melville's *Billy Budd*. Indeed, in the opera (as opposed to Melville's story) Vere's emotional 'conflict' is centralised and his narrative reminiscences frame the action, forming the prologue and epilogue. His memories, a fusion of operatic 'reality' and 'fantasy', are the filter through which the audience is invited to explore (and even judge) the events at sea in 1797. Moreover, by offering a glimpse of the captain's tortured mental state the prologue and epilogue underline the pivotal 'moral' conflict of the work, the tension between worldly duty (Vere's awareness of the necessity of military law in the wake of the Nore mutinies) and 'transcendental' love (Vere's belief in Billy's 'divine goodness' and the essential injustice of his death).

As the table above describes, the structure of the prologue and epilogue contains striking Verdian allusions. These include references to *prologo* and *epilogo* devices, *racconto* declamation and *scena e romanza* forms. A letter to Peter Pears dated 17 March 1950 (a year prior to the completion of *Billy Budd*), suggests a strong link between Verdi's *La traviata* and this work:

> My darling, La Travy [*La traviata*] has just arrived - & I am terribly thrilled with it! What a lovely present – you could have hardly ... have given me something which pleased me more. I have already wasted far too long browsing over it, but it didn't matter because I'm in a bit of a muddle over Billy & not ready to start on him again yet. Anyhow one learns so much from Verdi so B. B. will be a better opera for your present, I've no doubt![11]

Exploration of the *prologo* and *epilogo* of *Billy Budd*, in light of Verdi's *Aïda*, *Otello*, *Rigoletto* and *La traviata* and other middle-period operas such as *I due Foscari* and *Simon Boccanegra*, reveals a wealth of Italian resonances. The complexity of Vere's 'moral' dilemma, and the multivalent interpretations that the *prologo* and *epilogo* invite, are matched by an equally complex web of references to the Italian operatic tradition.

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[10] Benjamin Britten, 'Discussion on Billy Budd' (1960), *Britten on Music*, p. 207.
[11] Benjamin Britten, *Letters From a Life*, Vol. III, p. 582.

Vere's *prologo* and Verdian *racconto*

The *prologo* begins with an ethereal *preludio* for strings marked *andante* and *pp legato*. The unsettling effect of the opening is heightened by the bi-polar tonality (B*b*/B) and the hollow texture, consisting of two highly stratified lines.[12] This 'uncanny' sonority contributes to the distinctive *tinta*[13] of the work, suggesting the loneliness and uncertainty of the 'infinite sea',[14] and acting as a metaphor for Vere's emotional 'confusion.'[15] After the intervention of solemn, monumental brass chords Vere's narration begins. At first his *recitativo* is controlled, almost dispassionate. He introduces himself enigmatically ('I am an old man'[16]) in a gently undulating line over static chords, and goes on to describe his life of action and intellectual contemplation. Vere's 'simple'[17] diction is disrupted, however, by a brief *arioso*-like passage, which describes his continuing quest for 'eternal truth'.[18] The words are emphasised through melisma and repetition, and are set to an arching vocal line warmed by an *espressivo* marking. This emotional 'outpouring' (betraying Vere's desperate search for moral clarity) is followed by a resurgence of *recitativo*, this time in the form of a series of dislocated melodic fragments over nervous trills and anxious woodwind flurries. Contemplating the balance of 'good' and 'evil', Vere concludes that 'there is always some imperfection in the divine image'.[19] As will be shown, this moment is textually and musically prophetic.

After further agitated *recitativo*, Vere's narration becomes a soaring and self-accusatory *arioso*. His emotive – 'O what have I done?'[20] – emphasises the immediacy of his torment and expresses not only his past (as yet unnamed) dilemma

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[12] Philip Rupprecht, 'Tonal Stratification and Uncertainty in Britten's Music', *Journal of Music Theory*, Vol. 40, 1996, pp. 311-346.
[13] David Rosen, 'Meter, Character and *Tinta* in Verdi's Operas', *Verdi's Middle Period: Source Studies, Analysis, and Performance Practice*, ed. Martin Chusid, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1997, pp. 339-392.
[14] Benjamin Britten, *Billy Budd*, London, Boosey & Hawkes, 1960, p. 5.
[15] *Ibid.*, p. 5.
[16] *Ibid.*, p. 1.
[17] *Ibid.*, p. 1.
[18] *Ibid.*, p. 2.
[19] *Ibid.*, p. 3.
[20] *Ibid.*, p. 4.

but also his present anguish. The words 'I have tried to guide others rightly'[21] accompany the return of the opening string undulations, and the soaring line leads to the climax of the *prologo*: a melismatic setting of 'I have been lost on the infinite sea'.[22] After this high-point of intensification *recitative* returns, accompanied by another string of brass chords: 'Who has blessed me? Who saved me?'[23] The *prologo* concludes with a 'church-like' recitation over a single static chord, which introduces the date and setting of the action to follow. The scene is set for the 'cinematic flashback' that forms the body of the work. Vere's line dissolves to nothing as a swift transition from 'inner' contemplation to 'outer' action occurs. This move from the 'private' to the 'public' sphere is reminiscent of the opening of Verdi's *Rigoletto*, where the scene progresses from the private discussions of the Duke and Borsa to the courtly entertainments,[24] and also marks a transition between the 'present' and the 'past.'

Like Britten, Verdi uses prologues to centralise moral issues, introduce historical settings, and prepare the audience for the drama to follow. The *prologo* to *Simon Boccanegra*, for example, which focuses on the events surrounding the election of Simon as Doge in 1339, is an example of such operatic 'scene-setting'. In contrast to Britten's *prologo*, however, this introduction is a 'real time' flash-back involving many characters. (This opening strategy is closer to the beginning of Britten's *Peter Grimes* than to *Billy Budd*.) However, Verdi also introduces *racconto* declamation.

As Budden notes, a *racconto* (literally a 'tale') denotes a narrative set-piece in nineteenth-century opera.[25] A famous Verdian example is Ferrando's narrative *canzona* in *Il Trovatore*, which forms the *prologo* of the work. These include: Iago's (manipulative and false) recollection of Cassio's dream (*cavatina*, act II scene v), Desdemona's diegetic 'Willow Song' (*canzone*, act IV scene i), and the love duet between Otello and Desdemona (*duetto*, act I scene iii), which Britten greatly admired.[26] Verdi's *racconti* are not only closed dramatic structures ('stories within

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[21] *Ibid.*, p. 5.
[22] *Ibid.*, p. 5.
[23] *Ibid.*, p. 6.
[24] Giuseppe Verdi, *Rigoletto*, act I, p. 3.
[25] Julian Budden, 'Racconto', *Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie, London, Macmillan, 2001.
[26] Benjamin Britten, 'Verdi – A Symposium' (1951), *Britten on Music*, p. 102.

stories') but also reflexive commentaries on the wider action. Vere's *racconto*, too, is both 'self contained' and 'reflexive'.

However, while Verdi's characters are aware only of their status as narrators in their 'fictional reality', Vere appears to communicate with the audience directly. He addresses us in the first person singular. Furthermore, in contrast with the Verdian narrations above, Vere's narrative lapses into a stream of consciousness, a sequence of scattered yet interrelated memories, illustrated by orchestral timbres and imbued with 'hidden' meanings. Thus, Vere's narration conceals as much as it reveals. The audience is invited to empathise with the emotional implications of the opera *before* they experience their cause. (The manner in which the orchestra suggests the 'thoughts' behind Vere's words is explored below.) Moreover, while Vere's narrative is *racconto* in manner, its structure (*preludio – scena – arioso*) reflects Verdian *scena* as opposed to the set-piece forms usually associated with *racconto*. Indeed, it is only when the *prologo* and *epilogo* are taken *together* that the structure of the *racconto* emerges more clearly.

Vere's *epilogo* and Verdian *scena e romanza*

The *epilogo* mirrors the *prologo* in terms of key (B*b*/B polarity), texture (two stratified lines), and *tinta*. However, in the *epilogo* Vere's utterance becomes far more lyrical and *scena* leads to a short set-piece. In the *scena* a shifting pattern of affects is once again described. Vere passes from 'distanced' *recitativo* ('We committed his body to the deep'),[27] to intense and fragmentary *recitativo* over dry staccato chords ('I could have saved him')[28] to a resurgence of the soaring *arioso* of the *prologo* ('O what have I done?')[29]. The question 'Who saved me?'[30] that remained unanswered in the *prologo*, is answered here: 'He has saved me and blessed me, and the love that passes understanding has come to me.'[31] It appears that Billy's 'blessing' frees Vere (momentarily) from guilt and allows his hitherto 'restricted' utterance to flower into *bel canto* beauty. The set-piece involves a tonal shift to B*b* (a sign of the imminent

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[27] Benjamin Britten, *Billy Budd*, p. 330.
[28] *Ibid.*, pp. 331-332.
[29] *Ibid.*, p. 332.
[30] *Ibid.*, p. 6.
[31] *Ibid.*, pp. 332-333.

resolution of the opening B*b*/B polarity), regular line lengths (in what Crozier refers to as 'heightened prose'),[32] strict metres (5/4 and 4/4 alternations) and a vocal arch that spans the entire structure. Entropy then follows as the emotional climax gives way to dissolution and a resurgence of *recitativo* over held chords, during which time narrative distance is again achieved.

Taken together, the *prologo* and *epilogo* outline a single Verdian form – *scena e romanza* – split between the beginning and end of the opera: *preludio – scena – tempo di mezzo* (*arioso*) *– scena/scena – tempo di mezzo* (*arioso*) *– romanza – scena.* Verdian *romanzas* are usually written for the tenor voice and notated in simple time and, just as in Britten's *epilogo*, they frequently consist of one or two strophes and (unlike full *arias*) are seldom followed by *cabalettas*. Britten's *scena e romanza* thus invites comparison with the *scena e romanza* forms in both *Aïda* (Radamès, act I and Aïda, act III) and *I due Foscari* (Francesco Foscari, act I). Interestingly, Violetta's short aria in two strophes, 'Addio del passato,' in *La traviata* (act III) may also have offered a model for this form. Vere's *racconto scena e romanza* may thus be considered, somewhat paradoxically, as a split 'closed form', a divided Italian 'number'. Further instances of set-piece 'splitting' in the work are considered below.

Thematic references and Vere as a 'second narrator'

Verdi's orchestral *overtures* (for example that in *La traviata*), frequently introduce themes that foreshadow significant moments in the action to follow.[33] Similarly, Britten introduces pivotal themes ('themes of reminiscence') in the *prologo*, which foreshadow later events. He fuses Verdian *overture* techniques with a Verdian *racconto scena e romanza* form. Thus, Vere literally, and somewhat paradoxically, prophesises his recollections.

In the *prologo* two pivotal themes are introduced, the 'stammer' motif and the 'mutiny' motif. The 'stammer' theme is immediately linked with the idea of 'flawed'[34] goodness, and is musically illustrated by sustained trills and woodwind

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[32] Benjamin Britten, 'Discussion on Billy Budd' (1960), *Britten on Music*, p. 205.
[33] Joseph Kerman, 'Verdi's Use of Recurring Themes', *Studies in Music History*, pp. 495-510.
[34] Benjamin Britten, *Billy Budd*, p. 3.

flourishes. It is only in Billy's interview scene (act I, no. 4), however, that the theme is clearly identified as a musical description of Billy's stammer. Thus, the musical 'sign' remains disembodied, immanent until it is explained during the course of the action. (It can then be interpreted as a 'prophecy' by back-projection, a technique familiar from the sounds of the act III sick-room, heard in the prelude of *La traviata*.) Moreover, the theme recurs at many significant moments in the work: when Billy finds Squeak meddling with his possessions (act II, no. 3), when the Novice tempts Billy with thoughts of Mutiny (act II, no. 6), and finally and most dramatically when Billy strikes Claggart in the accusation scene (act III, no. 4).

Similarly the melodic shape of Vere's 'O what have I done?'[35] is echoed in both the working-songs of the ship's crew and the crew's wordless mutiny. The phrase, characterised by a rising fifth, acts as a *ritornello* ('O heave')[36] during the working scene (act I, no. 1), as a sign of comradeship (misunderstood as a threat of mutiny by the officers) when Billy bids farewell to the Rights O' Man (act I, no. 4), as a symbol of mutiny in Vere's cabin scene (act II, no. 1d) and finally as a furious wordless chorus after Billy's hanging (act IV, no. 3). Vere thus sets up the 'action' by musically foreshadowing its prominent themes: Billy's goodness and his 'flaw' and the solidarity of the ship's crew that may easily transform itself into violence.[37] Moreover, it is as though the orchestra conveys the 'thoughts' behind Vere's words here, revealing the meaning of and even prompting his fractured verbal utterances. The frequency with which these musical themes recur suggests Wagnerian *Leitmotive* as well as Verdian 'themes of reminiscence'. By drawing on both the Germanic and Italian operatic traditions, Britten typically creates a 'closed form' that includes wide-ranging thematic influence.

The *epilogo*, too, contains thematic connections with the body of the opera. Thus, the military march of death (literally the march to the scaffold) in act IV is used as an accompaniment figure to the beginning of Vere's narrative. Two other themes are also prominent: firstly, the sound of the ship's machinery (the slippery slither of dyads a

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[35] *Ibid.*, p. 4.
[36] *Ibid.*, p. 8.
[37] Sigmund Freud, 'Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego', *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. XVIII, 1920-1922, ed. James Strachey, London, Vintage, 2001.

tone apart) which accompanies the halyards (act I, no. 1), the call to clear the decks (act I, no. 4) and the preparation for combat (act III, no. 1c), secondly, the chords of shifting orchestral *tinta* that accompany Vere's *romanza*. These chords (much discussed by scholars)[38] are heard again during Vere's off-stage interview with Billy (act III, no. 7b), Billy's *cabaletta* (act IV, no. 1) and the procession on deck prior to Billy's hanging (act IV, no. 3).

Vere's *romanza* alludes in other ways to Billy's act IV *cabaletta* (part of a full *aria* as we shall see). Both set-pieces convey hope and reconciliation, as well as sharing regular phrase lengths, alternating time signatures and similar accompaniment figures. The close correspondence between Billy's *cabaletta* and Vere's *romanza* is surprising, however, as Vere wasn't present on stage to *hear* Billy's song. It is thus tempting to suggest that the 'action' is (at least in part) recounted by Vere; that his narrative voice weaves on, at times as a meta-text and at times as an overt intervention, in the events of 1779.[39] Vere thus 'envoices' Billy's song, in a manner reminiscent of Violetta's musical recollection of Alfredo's love song in *La traviata* and Desdemona's musical recollection of her mother's 'willow song' in *Otello*. In this reading, the action itself is conditioned by Vere's memories as well as by an 'omniscient' narrator, and the *prologo* and *epilogo* frame one large-scale *racconto*.

Evidence of Vere's narrative interventions in the body of the opera include his recollection of many 'unheard themes', such as Claggart's *credo* ('O beauty, o handsomeness, goodness'[40]) first heard in Claggart's *cavatina* in act II no. 4 and recalled by Vere in his *aria* in act III no. 7a. Moreover, the closed meanings and references to fate that saturate the text suggest that the action is retrospective rather than forward-looking. Furthermore, Vere frequently appears to step out of the 'real-time' world of 1797 to comment on, re-iterate and interpret the narrative (echoing the manner of the male and female choruses in *The Rape of Lucretia*). Even in the 'action' he appears to have the gift of foresight (what Forster terms 'prophetic

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[38] Barry Emslie, '*Billy Budd* and the Fear of Words', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 1992, pp. 43-59; Arnold Whittall, '"Twisted Relations: Method and Meaning in Britten's *Billy Budd*', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 1992, pp. 145-171.
[39] Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1996, p. 62.
[40] Benjamin Britten, *Billy Budd*, p. 133 and p. 293.

song').[41] For example, after Claggart's accusation he spells out the moral position: 'The boy whom you would destroy, he is good; you are evil'[42] (act III, no. 3). He also pre-empts Billy's death, drawing a symbolic conclusion: 'Struck by an angel … of God, yet the angel must hang'[43] (act III, no. 5).

3. Rituals, curses and fate

When Billy boards the *Indomitable* with two fellow sailors his fate is already sealed. He is marked out not only by his athletic physique and eager singing voice, but also by his stammer, a vocal impediment that acts as a metaphor for his status as 'sacrificial victim' in the opera. As Crozier notes, 'the devil slips his visiting card into every cargo of human goodness … there's nothing perfect, no human perfection that doesn't have its flaw.'[44] Even Billy's 'Christ-like' goodness is contaminated, and this contamination leads directly to his destruction in act IV. It is his inability to speak against the injustice of Claggart's accusations of mutiny in act III – a fatal failure of communication – that prompts him to lash out and kill his accuser, thus confirming his own death.

Billy's progress towards destruction, however, is not merely driven by the 'devil's visiting card'. Claggart, a complex embodiment of 'evil' (a necessary counter-balance to 'good') hastens Billy's demise by exploiting his 'flaw'. The sense of inevitability that accompanies the fatal progress of the work is understandable given the narrative status of the action – we see everything retrospectively through Vere's narrative – and the work's parable-art tone. Indeed, this 'parable' element points towards the melodramatic polarisation of good and evil. However, the guiding force of fate also asserts itself. As Forster insightfully observes, 'Vere is the only character that is truly tragic. The others are doing their jobs, following their destinies.'[45] Billy and Claggart do indeed appear to be 'following their destinies': they consciously (and unconsciously) play out their roles according to pre-ordained rules, imposed by Vere's manipulative epic story-telling and fate itself. To underline the

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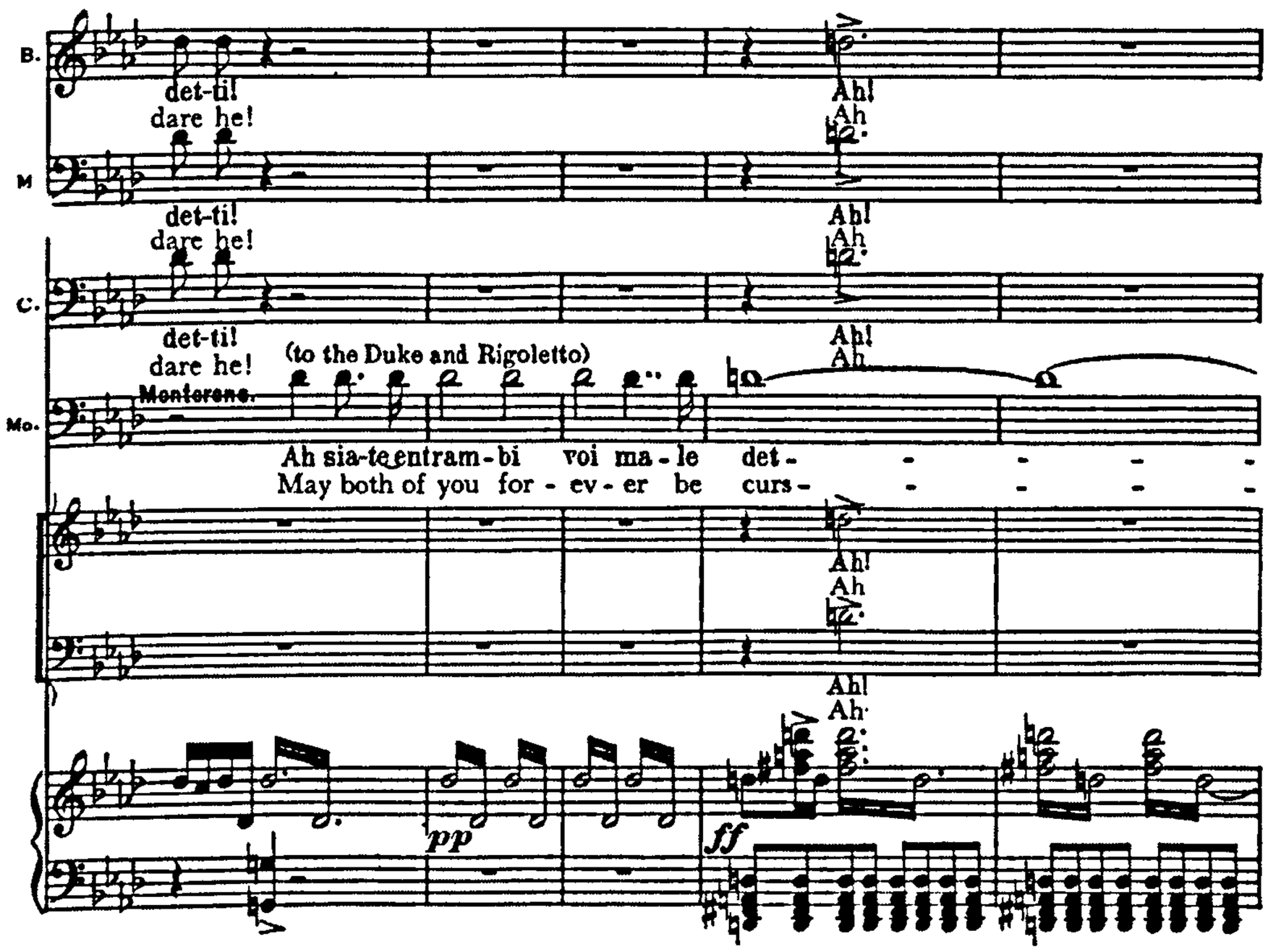
[41] E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, London, Penguin, 2000, p. 127.
[42] Benjamin Britten, *Billy Budd*, p. 243.
[43] *Ibid.*, p. 267.
[44] Benjamin Britten, 'Discussion on Billy Budd' (1960), *Britten on Music*, p. 205.
[45] *Ibid.*, p. 207.

point, Vere, Claggart, the Novice and even Billy step self-consciously out of the action to acknowledge the force that guides them.

Recognition of and acquiescence to 'other-worldly' forces is a prominent theme in Wagner's operas, but also in Verdi's. As noted above, in *Rigoletto*, realisation of fate (Monterone's curse in act I no. 5 and at the tragic conclusion, act IV no. 20), memory of prophetic dictates (such as Rigoletto's obsessive recollection of Monterone's curse, act II no. 6) [Figs 4.1a, 4.1b, 4.1c] and counter-appeals to heaven (Gilda's *preghiera* in act IV no. 18) are all key dramatic elements. Musically, Verdian fatalistic utterances, such as curses and incantations (and recollections of them), are signified by heightened diction and ritualised situations. As we shall see, these typically Verdian structural and vocal devices, which are plentiful in *Rigoletto*, *Un ballo in maschera*, *Simone Boccanegra* and *Aïda*, also appear at crucial moments in *Billy Budd*: the interview with the three sailors (act I no. 4), Claggart's accusation (act III no. 4) and finally the trial scene (act III no. 6).

Fig. 4.1a Monterone's curse on the Duke and Rigoletto, *Rigoletto*, act I no. 5, pp. 38-39.



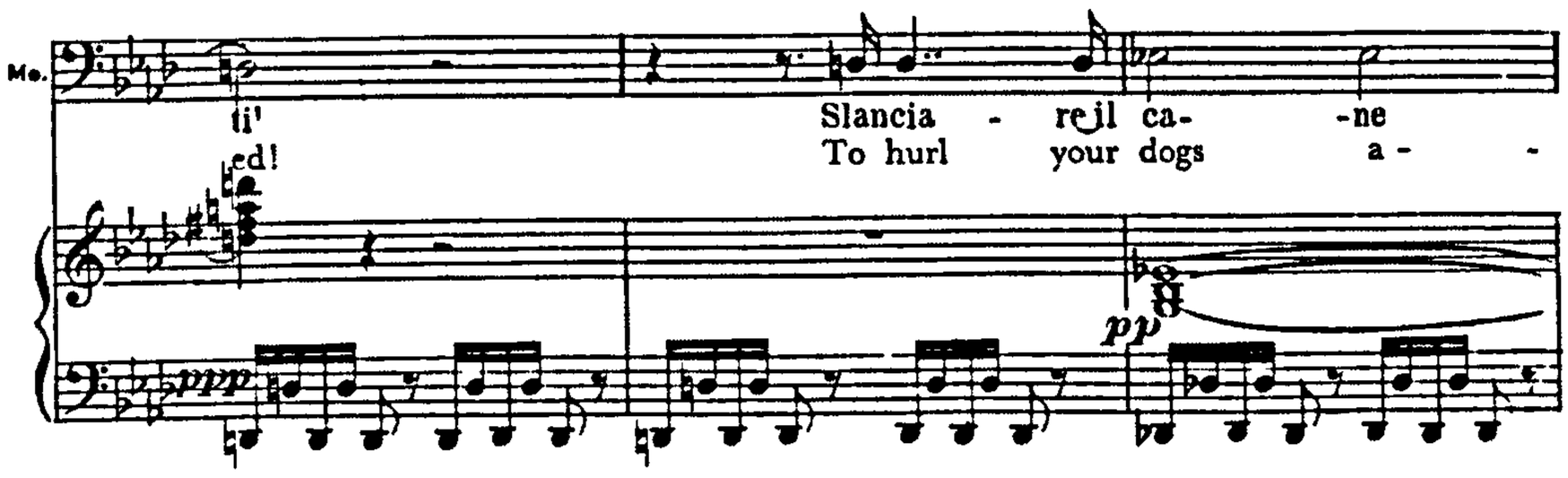


Fig. 4.1b Rigoletto's recollection of the curse before a conversation with Sparafucile, *Rigoletto*, Act II no. 6, p. 51.

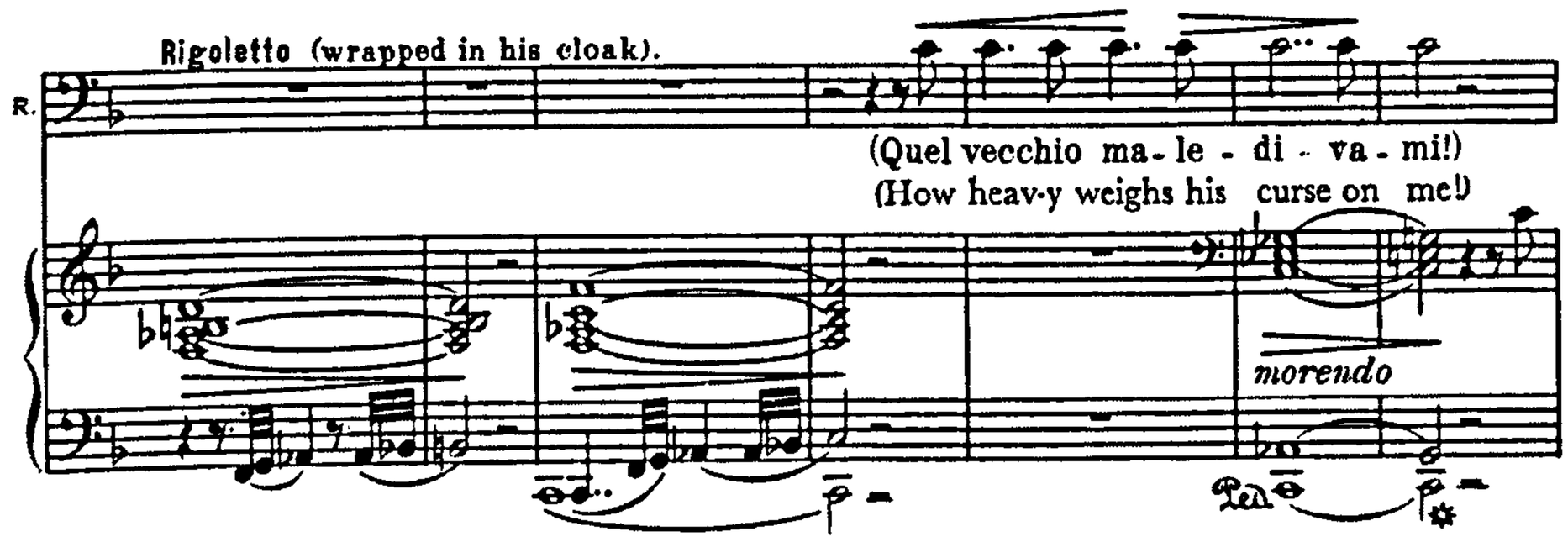
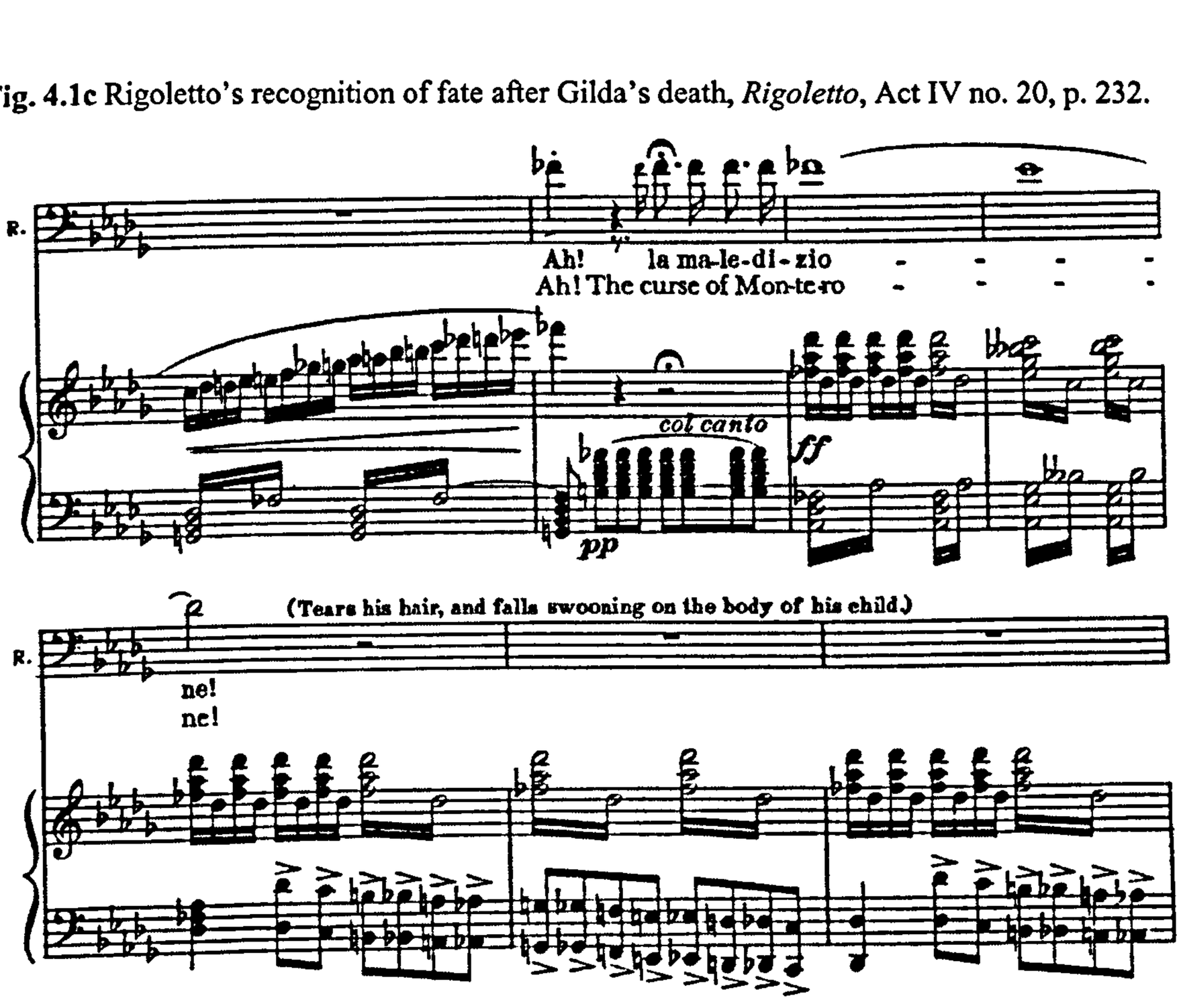


Fig. 4.1c Rigoletto's recognition of fate after Gilda's death, *Rigoletto*, Act IV no. 20, p. 232.



'Your name, your age' (act I no. 4)

The *intervesto*, a naval 'ritual', marks Claggart's first entrance. A monotone *rapporto* on B heralds the solemnity of the scene. Claggart, after a sinister reply to the First Lieutenant ('Your honour, I am at your disposal')[46] marked *dolce e liberamente*, cuttingly addresses the first recruit with clipped semiquavers ('First man forward!')[47]: this is aptly marked *lento feroce*. The juxtaposition of these two contrary affects, the obsequiousness of the first, abounding in fourth intervals and encompassing a G/G# tonal ambiguity that 'manipulates' a key change from C centrality to B centrality, and the harsh brutality of the second, epitomises Claggart's contradictory musical personality.[48] As Rupprecht describes it, this musical changeability is a sign of his untrustworthiness.[49] The *intervesto* that follows is divided into three clear parts. These introduce each of the recruits in turn: Red Whiskers, Arthur Jones and Billy Budd. This is followed by Billy's emphatic *arioso* 'Billy Budd, king of the birds!'[50] Finally there is a *scena e coro* as the men are sent below decks amid the songs of the crew ('Rights O'Man'),[51] their chorus awakening the mistrust of the officers.

The three-fold structure of the *intervesto* recalls the three-part forms of Verdian ritual scenes. Such rituals often involve a solemn act (in this case a formal interview) with one character of authority who may adopt 'superhuman' status and a chorus (in this case Claggart and the officers) addressing a single character (in this case three men one by one) in a 'ceremonial' setting.[52] Verdian examples include Radamès' trial before the priests in act III of *Aïda* and the witches' *incantesimo* in act I of *Macbeth*. Although Britten's *intervesto* is not a trial, incantation or religious rite, it *is* a test, an 'initiation rite' that has formal and social significance. As Frits Noske notes, Verdian ritual scenes usually fall into three distinct sections: the priests address Radamés three times prompting an impassioned plea from Amneris after each of his fatal silences; likewise the witches recount their oracles to Macbeth in a three-part form.[53] The

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[46] Benjamin Britten, *Billy Budd*, p. 31.
[47] *Ibid.*, p. 31.
[48] Philip Rupprecht, *Britten's Musical Language*, p. 93.
[49] Philip Rupprecht, 'Motive and Narrative in *Billy Budd*'.
[50] Benjamin Britten, *Billy Budd*, p. 43.
[51] *Ibid.*, p. 46.
[52] Frits Noske, 'Ritual Scenes', *The Signifier and the Signified: Studies in the Operas of Verdi and Mozart*, The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1977, p. 241.
[53] *Ibid.*, p. 241.

mounting tension of each of these exchanges is compounded by repetition of (nearly) identical material raised by successive semitones.

The ritual elements of the *intervesto* in *Budd* are plentiful, but veiled. The low B pedal, ominously marked *fp* that begins the scene remains in place until the final stages of the interview. Although Verdian semitonal ascent (in the bass) is avoided, the held chord and accompanying harmonic stasis suggest a strongly ritualistic undercurrent to the action. Moreover, the entire scene is governed by a gradual *accelerando* (*lento feroce – poco più mosso – ancora più animato*), which contributes to affective intensification through the three sections. The 'pushing' semiquaver motif (the *intervesto* figure), mimetically suggesting Claggart's threatening gestures, underlines the brutality of the interview. But beneath this surface realism, Claggart's insistent questions ('Your name?'),[54] tracing obsessive F#-B intervals, compound the ritual symbolism. Repetition transforms Claggart's interrogative utterances into something like a 'mantra'.

Red Whiskers, the first to be interviewed, answers with a markedly different vocal tone. Rather than reflecting the cold restraint of Claggart, his lively words and pitches are haphazard ('I object')[55] and alive with florid patterns and rapid *crescendi*. The social distinction between Claggart's strict, controlling pronouncements and Red Whiskers' uncontrolled, fearful yet defiant whimpering is also underlined by the alternation between strict time and free time. The interview is concluded by Claggart, the First Lieutenant and the Sailing Master, who assign his place on the ship. Britten's character vignettes are especially vivid here and the Sailing Master's reply recalls the 'swaying' rhythmic patterns and *cantabile* diction that characterise his previous *arioso* (act I no. 2). Like the trial scene in *Aïda*, questioning leads to judgement, with the officers taking the place of the high priests. Crucially, however, Red Whiskers does not respond to the questioning with silence.

After Red Whiskers is 'hustled away'[56] the cycle begins for a second time. In contrast, however, Arthur Jones' utterance is less chaotic and is characterised by

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[54] Benjamin Britten, *Billy Budd*, p. 32.
[55] *Ibid.*, p. 32.
[56] *Ibid.*, p. 35.

fearful, submissive A-C intervals. Although the three-part pattern – questioning, deliberation, assignment – is repeated (a three-fold structure embedded within the larger three-fold structure), Britten replaces Verdi's *exact* repetition with meaningful variation, to reveal the individual character of each of the men. The scene thus brings to mind, in miniature, act I scene ii of *Un ballo in maschera*, where the three interviews with the soothsayer Ulrica (involving Silvano, Amelia and Riccardo) are richly characterised. After the deliberations of the officers, Arthur Jones is assigned to the Forepeak with Red Whiskers. As in Radamés's trial, however, the cycle is destined to recur a third and final time.

The next man forward is Billy Budd. His eager, obedient answers characterised by boisterous intervals (he follows each response with a school-room-like 'sir!')[57] reveal that his origins and age are unknown and that he can sing but not read. The officers are hopeful. At the resurgence of the arpeggiated 'Rights O'Man' theme, they muse over their success: 'Better fortune at last'.[58] Billy's status as an athletic, 'good' yet child-like protagonist is immediately defined. His youthful naivety is especially evident in his over-enthusiastic offer, set to an ascending line with a crescendo to nothing, 'But I can sing'.[59] However, the jubilation is curtailed by his stammer. At fig. 27 the stammer music of the *prologo* returns, marked '*lento* as in the prologue', and the trilling woodwind flourishes betray Billy's distressed, inarticulate grunts ('a').[60] Quickly drawing the moral, the Sailing Master pronounces prophetically 'There is always some flaw in them',[61] recognising the 'devil's visiting card' identified by Crozier. (As Vere emphasises the significance of the 'stammer in the divine speech'[62] in the *prologo* we also recognise his 'authorial voice' here.) Billy's vulnerability is underlined by Claggart's subsequent, treacherous insinuations: 'A find in a thousand, your honour. A beauty. A jewel'.[63] In this way he foreshadows his devilish *credo* in act II. Significantly, this is the first break with the B pedal, as once again Claggart 'manipulates' the musical process. The chords here slide semitonally, revealing what

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[57] *Ibid.*, p. 36.
[58] *Ibid.*, p. 37.
[59] *Ibid.*, p.37.
[60] *Ibid.*, p. 39.
[61] *Ibid.*, p. 39.
[62] *Ibid.*, p. 4.
[63] *Ibid.*, p. 41.

Rupprecht aptly terms Claggart's 'triadic artfulness'.[64] Claggart recognises his opposite (the 'good' to match his 'evil'), and this moment of recognition sets their destiny in motion. Not realising the portent of Claggart's words, however, Billy launches into his *vivace arioso* in celebration of his newly-acquired post of Foretopman. Moreover, it is his ability to empathetically sing the name of his ship ('Rights O'Man') to the contour of the *Indomitable*'s working song that ironically marks out his *difference* in the eyes of the officers. They are alarmed.

Like the witches' scene in *Macbeth*, the *intervesto* involves prophecy ('always some flaw') and a realisation of destiny. Although the supernatural is not overtly evoked, Claggart does appear to take on a 'superhuman', diabolical quality. Significantly, the three-fold structure also recalls the Freudian 'rule of three'.[65] Deriving his theory from fairy-tales, Greek tragedy and Shakespearean drama, Freud suggests that the third in a group is often marked out for death and that this is often underlined by a character's silence. Billy's verbal inarticulateness does indeed prophesize his demise.

'William Budd, I accuse you' (act III no. 4)

Silence and stammering are also vital symbols in the accusation scene (act III no. 4). Here, Claggart and Billy are brought before Vere, and in a highly charged *scena* Claggart formally accuses Billy of mutiny. Vere's cautionary opening, outlining the articles of war ('You stand before your commander as accuser and accused')[66] in a 'quasi-religious' tone with much note repetition, emphasises the solemnity of the meeting. The brass repetitions that characterise the opening of the first act also recur, recalling naval 'duty' and the importance of discipline. Vere then cautions them with the words 'Remember, both of you, the penalties of falsehood',[67] marked, emphatically, *lento marcato*. He then commands Claggart to speak.

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[64] Philip Rupprecht, 'Motive and Narrative in *Billy Budd*', p. 94.
[65] Sigmund Freud, 'The Theme of the Three Caskets', *Art and Literature*, trans. James Strachey, ed. Albert Dickson, London, Penguin Books, 1990, pp. 233-248.
[66] Benjamin Britten, *Billy Budd*, p. 253.
[67] *Ibid.*, p. 254.

Claggart's *cavatina* (*accusa*) begins with four confrontational ascending phrases, each rising in pitch and dynamic intensity: (1) 'William Budd, I accuse you of insubordination' on A; (2) 'William Budd, I accuse you of aiding our enemies' on B*b*; (3) 'William Budd, I accuse you of bringing French gold on board' on D#; and finally (4) 'William Budd, you are a traitor to your country and king! I accuse you of mutiny'[68]on C. These rising and increasingly elaborate accusations (which also involve ritual 'naming') reach a climax with the final invocation. The sinister effect is intensified by Claggart's deep bass register and the orchestration, including bass-clarinet and trombone. (Verdi uses similar orchestration in the ballet scene in *Macbeth*. Significantly, in a letter to Léon Escudier dated 23 January 1865 he notes: 'it is needless, too, for me to say that this *adagio* must be played with the clarone or clarinetto-basso (as is indicated), producing in unison with the cello and bassoon the deep austere tones which the situation demands'.)[69] As a matter of vocal casting, many of Verdi's 'cursers' are also low-voice roles (the agent of fate is accorded a dark, deep timbre) – Monterone is a bass and Ulrica is a mezzo-soprano. The vocal casting of *Billy Budd* is also three-fold and abounds in triangular configurations. In addition to the Vere (tenor), Billy (baritone), Claggart (bass) group there are Redburn (baritone) Flint (bass-baritone) Lieutenant Ratcliffe (bass) and Red Whiskers (tenor) Donald (baritone) Dansker (bass). The climax of Claggart's accusation consists of a series of repeated Cs, signifying the portentousness of his remarks and investing his words with fateful significance [Fig. 4.2].[70]

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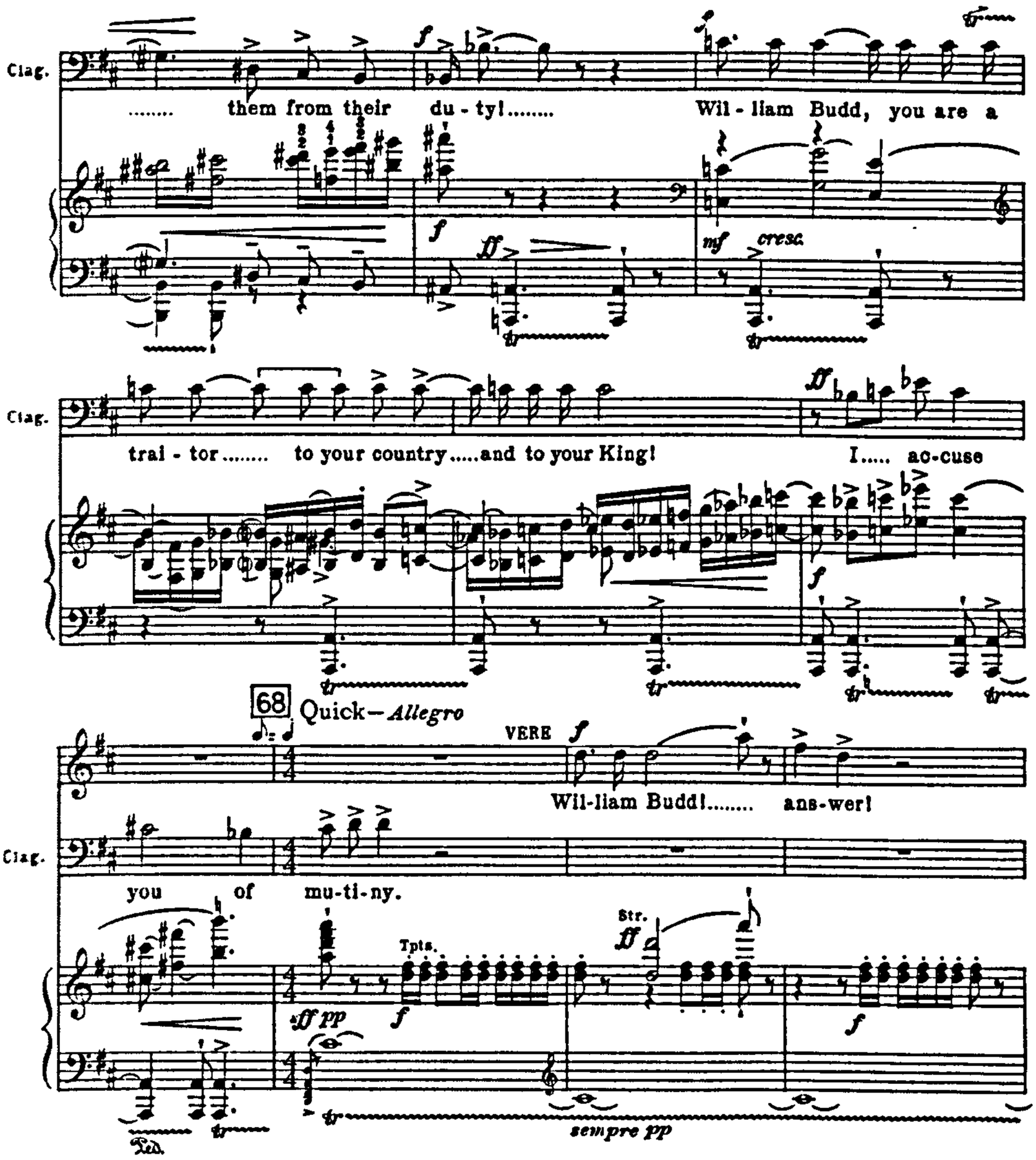
[68] *Ibid.*, pp. 254-256.
[69] J. G. Prodhomme, 'Verdi's Letters to Leon Escudier', *Music & Letters*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 1923, p. 69.
[70] Piero Weiss, 'Verdi and the Fusion of Genres', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 1982, p. 154.

Fig. 4.2 Claggart's accusation, *Billy Budd*, act III no. 4, p. 256.



With his 'curse', superstition enters into the civilised society of the ship. Indeed, *worldly* law is brought here into direct confrontation with the *other worldly*, a potent mixture that also characterises *Un ballo in maschera*, as Wintle has remarked.[71] Moreover, the rising repetition, especially the semitonal ascent that begins the sequence, is also typically Verdian, an effective means of prompting intensification. A similar effect is evident in Macbeth's reaction to the witches' oracle in *Macbeth* (act III) and the Doge's realisation of his imminent demise in *Simone Boccanegra* (Act II).[72] Furthermore, the curse is an almost exact parallel to *Rigoletto* act I where, to repeated Cs, Monterone curses Rigoletto and the Duke for conspiring to corrupt the honour of his daughter.

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[71] Christopher Wintle, 'The Enlightened Sound of Fate: Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera*', *Royal Opera House Programme*, April, 2005, p. 35.
[72] Frits Noske, 'Ritual Scenes', pp. 251/257.

In *Budd* the curse is pronounced and is fulfilled by the end of act IV. Yet operatic curses are rarely so straightforward. In *Rigoletto*, Monterone is revenged against Rigoletto, but is also led to the gallows himself. The price for cursing is paid by the cursers, the danger in any devilish pact. (As Ronald Hutton suggests, in pagan witchcraft the 'law of three-fold return' means that curses rebound on the one who curses with three times their original intensity.)[73] Significantly, this is played out even more dramatically in *Simone Boccanegra*, where Paolo, who has attempted to abduct the Doge's daughter, is forced to curse the perpetrator of the crime in a tense council scene. In affect he curses *himself*. In the *tempo di mezzo* after Claggart's accusation, Billy's stammer returns, symbolising imminent danger. Despite Vere's fatherly *sotto voce* 'Take your time, my boy',[74] Billy's fist flies towards Claggart, a bodily expression of his affronted innocence. With Billy's passionate *ff* cry of 'devil!'[75] Claggart drops *before* the object of his curse.

Billy's cry amidst a tempestuous outburst from the orchestra unveils Claggart's collusion with Satan, and recalls many Verdian parallels: in *Simone Boccanegra* Paolo refers to himself as the devil, in *Otello* Iago sings a devil's *credo* and in *Un ballo in maschera* Ulrica appeals to the devil in order to tell the future.[76] Indeed, in his *credo* Claggart declares 'I established an order such as reigns in hell'.[77] As we have seen, the elevated diction that Claggart adopts is also an act of hubris for which he is punished, although, ironically, his death is a decisive factor in Billy's own.

Claggart's death is followed by another invocation, this time from Vere to *God* – a further dramatic polarity. In an attempt to counter-balance Claggart's curse he intones 'God o'mercy! Here, help me! Help me!'[78] to a single reiterated E. This reiteration is a Verdian device used frequently for invocation of supra-mortal powers. This counter-prayer is reminiscent of Vere's earlier entreaty 'O for the light, the light

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[73] Ronald Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 396.
[74] Benjamin Britten, *Billy Budd*, p. 257.
[75] *Ibid.*, p. 258.
[76] Christopher Wintle, 'The Enlightened Sound of Fate: Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera*', p. 35.
[77] Benjamin Britten, *Billy Budd*, p. 134.
[78] *Ibid*, p. 258.

of clear Heaven to separate evil from good'[79] and echoes Verdian appeals to heaven in *Rigoletto* (the dying Gilda), *Un ballo in maschera* (Amelia's entreaties) and *Simon Boccanegra* (the wedding rite). Vere's shocked utterance continues as he turns Billy away and realises the gravity of his situation with full emotional intensity: 'The mists have cleared – O terror what do I see'.[80] Importantly, Vere's sensitivity allows him to comprehend the implications of the curse, while Billy is left dumb and confused.

Although the structure here is not ritualistic, the interview involves curses and two contradictory invocations to 'transcendental' figures (the Devil and God). As Vere observes, imposing another of his closed meanings, 'Fated boy, what have you done?'[81]

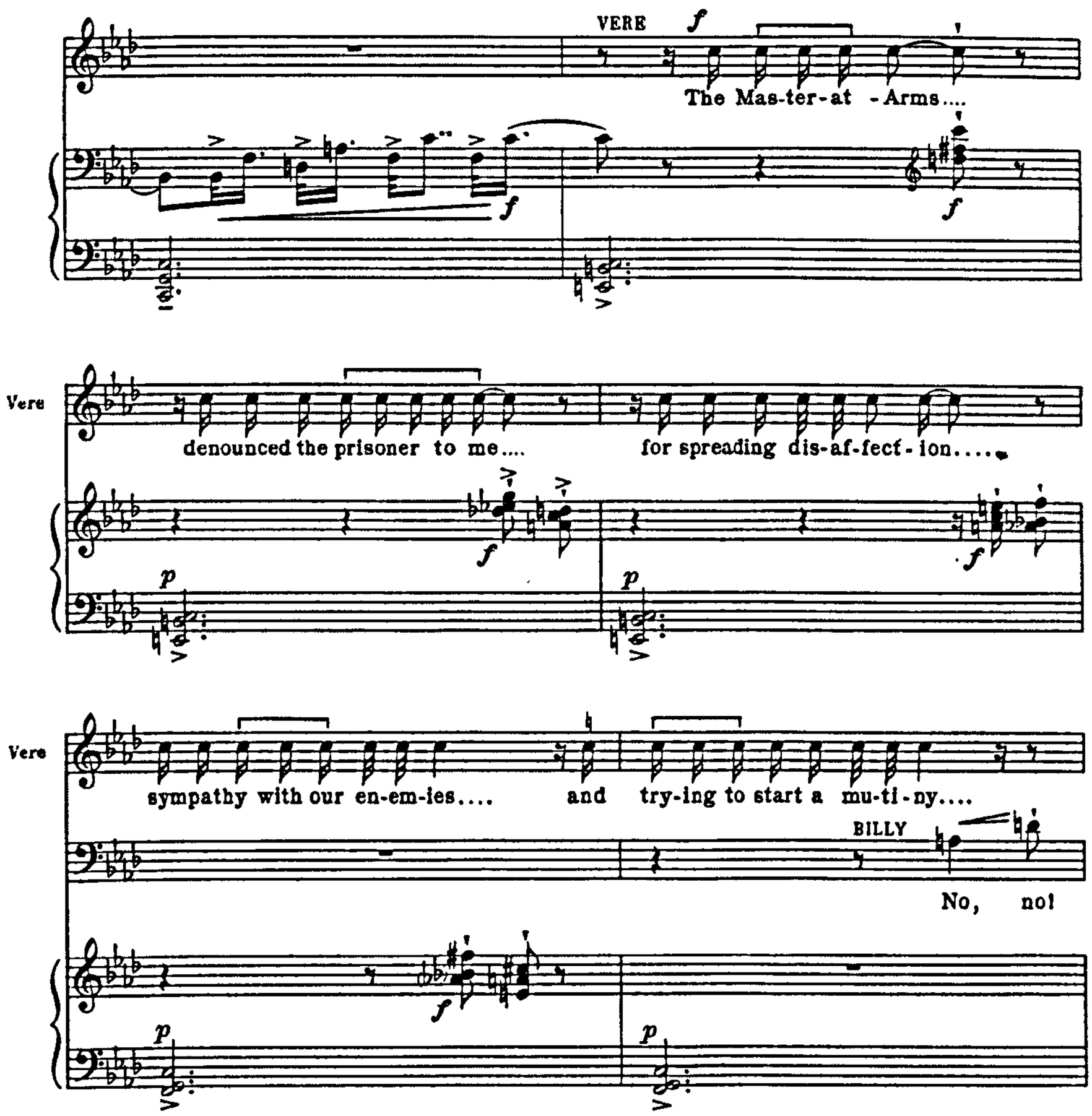
'We've no choice' (act III no. 6)

What Billy has done is revealed in the trial scene (act III no. 6). At its beginning, the First Lieutenant reads the articles of war. Once again the monotonal intonation heralds a ritual scene. This time, however, the structure is less rigid and loose *scena* passages are unified by four recurrences of an orchestral *ritornello*: this consists of echoes of the 'mist theme' and foreboding dotted figures. Sinisterly, the rhythmic pattern and contour of 'O beauty, O handsomeness, goodness' (first heard in Claggart's *credo*) reverberates here, a sign perhaps that Claggart's presence (his 'ghost') guides the action.

This time, *Vere* accuses Billy Budd in a *racconto* on C, recalling the Cs of Claggart's curse [Fig. 4.3].

[79] *Ibid.*, p. 238.
[80] *Ibid.*, p. 260.
[81] *Ibid.*, p. 259.

Fig. 4.3 Vere's accusation, *Billy Budd*, act III no. 6, p. 273.



In a cruel role-reversal Vere exchanges the part of judge for that of accuser. Billy answers the Sailing Master's questions monosyllabically on a single A. Ironically, however, he is able here to answer the charge with words, in a passionate *vivace* outburst that pulls the tonality momentarily from a dark A*b* major to a bright A major ('It's a lie!').[82] Rather than his *own* silence, it is *Vere's* silence that condemns him. Other than another obsessive recollection of Claggart's Cs for 'I have told you all I have seen, I have no more to say',[83] Vere remains silent to Billy's calls for worldly salvation. The C, which supersedes the E of his earlier *preghiera*, suggests that Vere has already accepted the course of destiny. Moreover, while in Verdian opera it is often the victim who recognises and even hastens his fateful course, here Vere has the

[82] *Ibid.*, p. 276.
[83] *Ibid.*, p. 278.

insight Billy lacks. Vere's later remark that it is *his* trial rather than Billy's suggests that it is a test for the accuser as well as the accused.

After the orchestral ritornello the First Lieutenant, Sailing Master and Ratcliffe retire to make their decision. Their *terzetto* highlights the pull between humanity and duty, their answer conditioned by 'the King's Regulations' and the 'Mutiny Act'.[84] The fateful nature of the scene is revealed through their sinister unison repetitions of 'We've no choice'.[85] Thus, the large-scale ritual organisation of the *intervesto* is replaced by ritualistic pronouncements that weave through the scene, as a sign of resignation. This statuesque quality is enhanced by seven repetitions of the phrase, as their deliberations bring them back again and again to the inevitability of their decision. The static quality echoes the 'good night' scene in *The Rape of Lucretia* as well as the ritualistic elements in Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex*. Moreover, the affective restraint of this scene throws the passionate emotion released in Vere's subsequent aria into stark relief.

At the close of the scene, Vere once again denies Billy help: 'No, do not ask me'.[86] Again repeated Cs open a phrase that, significantly, traces a deathly tritone. His demand, 'Pronounce your verdict',[87] on held Cs, is followed by a pause, before a pronouncement of 'Guilty' and 'Death. Hanging from the yard-arm'.[88] This pause is also a sign of death frequently used by Verdi. A short *scena* leads to the final instrumental *ritornello* [Fig. 4.4].

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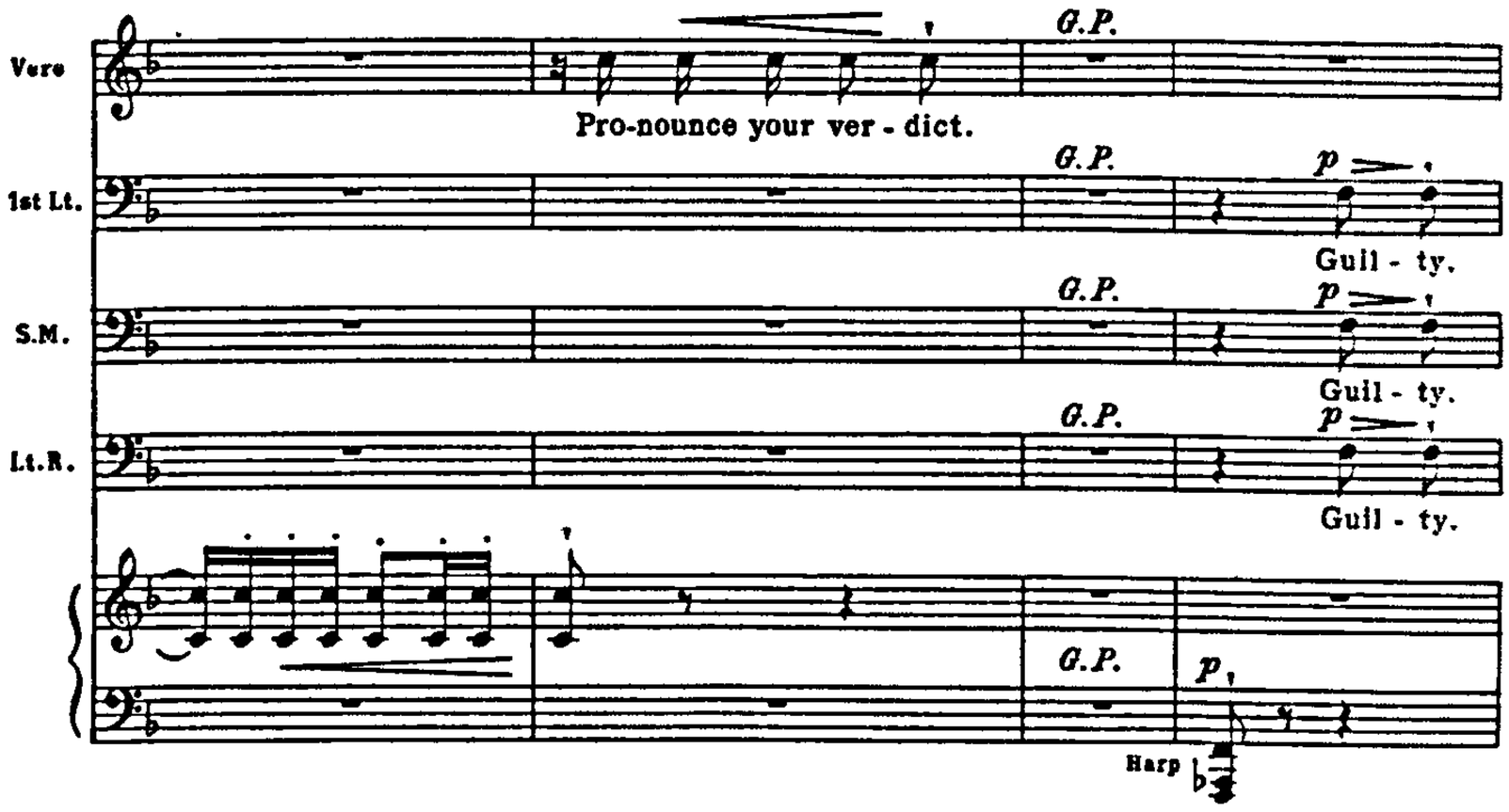
[84] *Ibid.*, p. 281.
[85] *Ibid.*, p. 281.
[86] *Ibid.*, p. 287.
[87] *Ibid.*, p. 287.
[88] *Ibid.*, p. 288.

Fig. 4.4 Vere's 'ritual' command, *Billy Budd*, act III no. 6, p. 287.



It is Vere's collusion in Billy's death that is the final and tragic twist of fate. Billy and Claggart may be impelled by destiny, but it is Vere in this crucial moment who is forced to choose between law and human compassion. His silence in the face of this decision is eloquent as he decides on death.

4. Claggart as Iago

In a letter to Britten dated 31 August 1949, Lord Harewood notes enthusiastically: 'It was tremendously exciting to hear the end of [*Billy Budd*] for the first time … Each time I hear it, I can only compare its emotional impact to that of "Otello."'[89] Harewood, a board member of Covent Garden Opera and a keen Verdian, immediately recognised not only the affective 'impact'[90] of *Billy Budd*, but its deep affinity with Verdi's work.

The link between *Billy Budd* and *Otello* is underlined by the textual and dramatic parallels between Iago's *credo* (act II) and Claggart's *credo* (act II no. 4). As Forster recalls, 'in that particular monologue of Claggart – I was thinking a bit of the one in Verdi's *Otello*, of the Iago monologue.'[91] Although this connection has been discussed frequently in Britten (and Verdi) studies, the depth of the *musical*

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[89] Philip Reed, 'From First Thoughts to First Night: A *Billy Budd* Chronology', *Cambridge Opera Handbooks: Billy Budd*, p. 69.
[90] *Ibid.*, p. 69.
[91] Benjamin Britten, 'Discussion on Billy Budd' (1960), *Britten on Music*, p. 205.

connection has not been fully explored.[92] The two *credos* share a multitude of structural, generic and thematic gestures that emphasise the similarities between Iago and Claggart – two villains driven by envy, two manipulative 'devils' who prey on the weaknesses of others. Significantly, the comparison also highlights their essential differences: while Iago is the devil's 'slave', a satanic figure marked out by fate, Claggart is a Lucifer, a fallen devil who *feels*.[93] The glimmer of humanity behind Claggart's 'evil', which caused a pivotal authorial disagreement between Britten and Forster, once again reveals the composer's 'humanist' concerns. Importantly, the *credo* also contributes to the opera's powerful homoerotic subtext.

Iago's *credo* ...

After arranging an assignation between Cassio and Desdemona, designed to awaken Otello's jealousy, Iago is left alone (act II). As he 'follows [Cassio's departure] with his eyes',[94] he gloats over his daemonic powers of manipulation: '*Ti spinge il tuo dimone e il tuo dimone son io, e me trascina il mio*' ('For you are but a puppet, a babbling tool of mischief, your fiendish guide is I').[95] His discourse consists of short declamatory phrases (*canto declamato*) punctuated by surreptitious triplet figures from the orchestra. The intensity of the passage increases as B*b* repetitions, *marcato* diction and a long *crescendo* lead to a striking *parola scenica* – '*Idio*' ('evil')[96] – on a fiendish D*b* chord. This launches the *credo*.

As Hepokoski notes, the *credo* falls into three parts, each beginning with '*credo*' or '*e credo*', forming a ternary design: A B A'. The A section opens with what Julian Budden refers to as unison 'pillars of negative affirmation'[97] and an F minor tonality [Fig. 4.5]. These *ff* accented octaves set the tone of the entire set-piece, heralding Iago's solemn intonations. Iago's declarations are also punctuated by a second recurring motif, characterised by 'daemonic' triplet subdivisions - the 'infernal dance'

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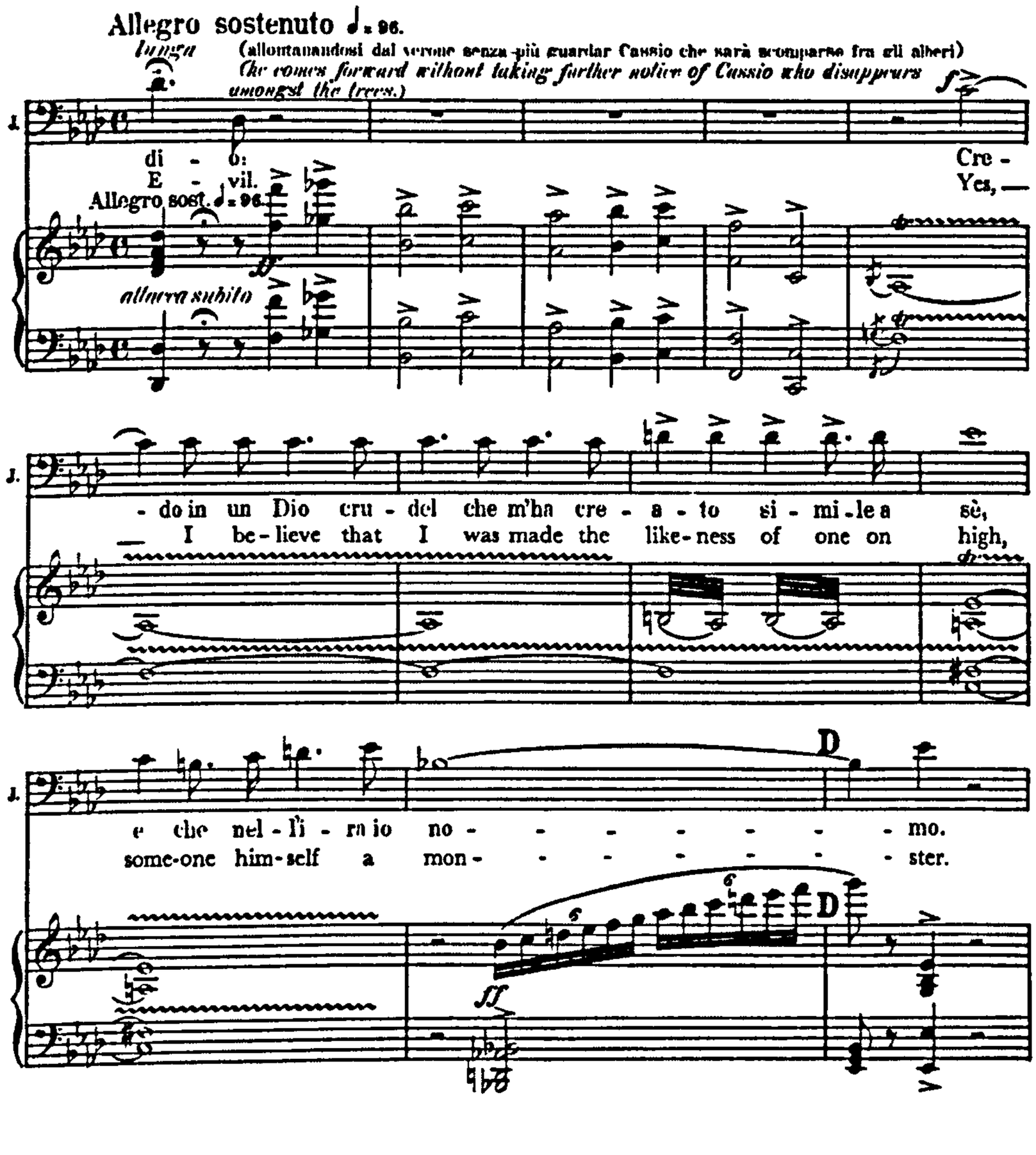
[92] Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi*, Vol. 3, p. 317.
[93] 'Melville did seem to envisage him really, didn't he, as a kind of fallen Lucifer; I don't remember if he actually describes him as that but there is this sense of a man almost of greatness, a man of great capacity, who has fallen into evil, and who is profoundly distressed and melancholy.' Eric Crozier, *Britten on Music*, p. 206.
[94] *Ibid.*, p. 113.
[95] *Ibid.*, p. 113.
[96] *Ibid.*, p. 113.
[97] Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi*, Vol. 3, p. 358.

of the devil. Iago declares that he was *born* evil, that he is fated to destroy: '*Credo in un Dio crudel che m'ha creato simile a sè, e che nell' ira io nomo*' ('I believe that I was made the likeness of one on high, someone himself a monster').[98] He disavows human agency and himself becomes a 'puppet' to the devil's intentions. His religious rhetoric, coloured by chant-like repetitions, ironically accentuates the *anti*-Christian message. The section ends with a return to F minor and a powerful assertion of the unison motif.

Fig. 4.5 Iago's *credo*, *Otello*, act II scene i, p. 114.



The B section involves three sub-subsections and a semi-tonal ascent from C minor to D*b* minor and finally to D minor. As Hepokoski outlines 'the entire second part is a set of radical phrase-variations subjected to progressive disintegration – a

[98] Giuseppe Verdi, *Otello*, p. 114.

typically late-Verdian treatment'.[99] The phrases become more frenzied and dislocated, suggesting not only the intensity of Iago's convictions, but his mounting anger. It appears that his allegiance with the devil involves great affective engagement; his *envy* is as powerful as Otello's *jealousy*. As Boito writes in the *disposizione scenica*, 'Iago is envy. Iago is a villain. Iago is a *critic*'.[100]

Finally, the A' section heralds the return of the unison motif and also F minor. Here, Iago's tonal movements are frequently obscured by diminished chords and in the last moments Iago produces a *coup de théâtre*: a deceptive plagal cadence on D*b*. Immediately afterwards, however, it is revealed as a cruel joke. After diabolical laughter F minor re-asserts itself.

Iago's creed reveals not only his manipulative nature (his deceptive tonal games) but also his evil, by means of an abundance of musical signs. His character is emphasised by his declamatory vocal diction saturated with fourth intervals, the dark timbre of the accompaniment, and a multitude of menacing trills, frequent triplet instrumental patterns and ritualistic repetitions. And these 'signs' of evil recur tellingly throughout the work, acting as 'recalling themes' to mark Iago's presence. Moreover, the three-fold ascending chromatic nature of the central part of the *credo*, embedded within the larger-scale three-part organisation, is highly ritualistic. In his solitary 'ceremony' Iago appears not only to soliloquise about his situation, but to invoke the very negative powers that he talks of. Like Ulrica in *Un ballo*, he calls on the Devil's aid in *negative* invocation.

... Claggart's *credo*

Claggart's *credo* is also prefaced by a *parola scenica*: 'Handsomely done, my lad'[101] (act II no. 4). After Billy's fight with Squeak, who meddled with his bags, Claggart aggressively stops the brawl. He chastises Squeak, whose actions he himself directed earlier in the scene, and muses over Billy's physical beauty in a sinister way. His diction oscillates between brutal, barking command and leering, sensuous

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[99] James A. Hepokoski, *Cambridge Opera Handbooks: Otello*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987, p. 146.
[100] Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi*, Vol. 3, p. 328.
[101] Benjamin Britten, *Billy Budd*, p. 130.

obsequiousness. His musical duplicity once again underlines his manipulative qualities. The similarity between Boito's description of Iago's character and Claggart's musical personality is startling: 'One of his talents is the faculty he possesses of changing his personality according to the person to whom he happens to be speaking, so as to deceive them or bend them to his will.'[102]

When Forster heard the *credo* itself for the first time, however, authorial disagreement ensued. In a famous letter to Britten written during December 1948 he states:

> [The *credo*] is *my* most important piece of writing and I did not, at my first hearings, feel it sufficiently important musically ... Returning to it, I want *passion* – love constricted, perverted, poisoned, but nevertheless *flowing* down its agonising channel; a sexual discharge gone evil. Not soggy depression or growling remorse. I seemed to be turning from one musical discomfort to another, and was dissatisfied. I looked for an aria perhaps, for a more recognisable form. I liked the last section best, and if it is extended so that it dominates, my vague objections may vanish. 'A longer line, a firmer melody' – exactly.[103]

From his objections, it is clear that Forster felt that Claggart had been too sympathetically handled. 'Soggy depression or growling remorse'[104] was not what he had hoped for. While Forster appears to have thought of Claggart's 'love' as irredeemably evil, a product of 'natural depravity'[105] (almost) as malignant as Iago's, Britten appears to have seen the vulnerability behind the satanic facade.

Forster's comments about form, however, are contradicted by the clear delineations of the set-piece. The *credo* may not fall into a traditional aria form, but its ternary form (with an added middle section) owes much to Verdi's *credo*: A A' B C A" coda [Fig. 4.6].

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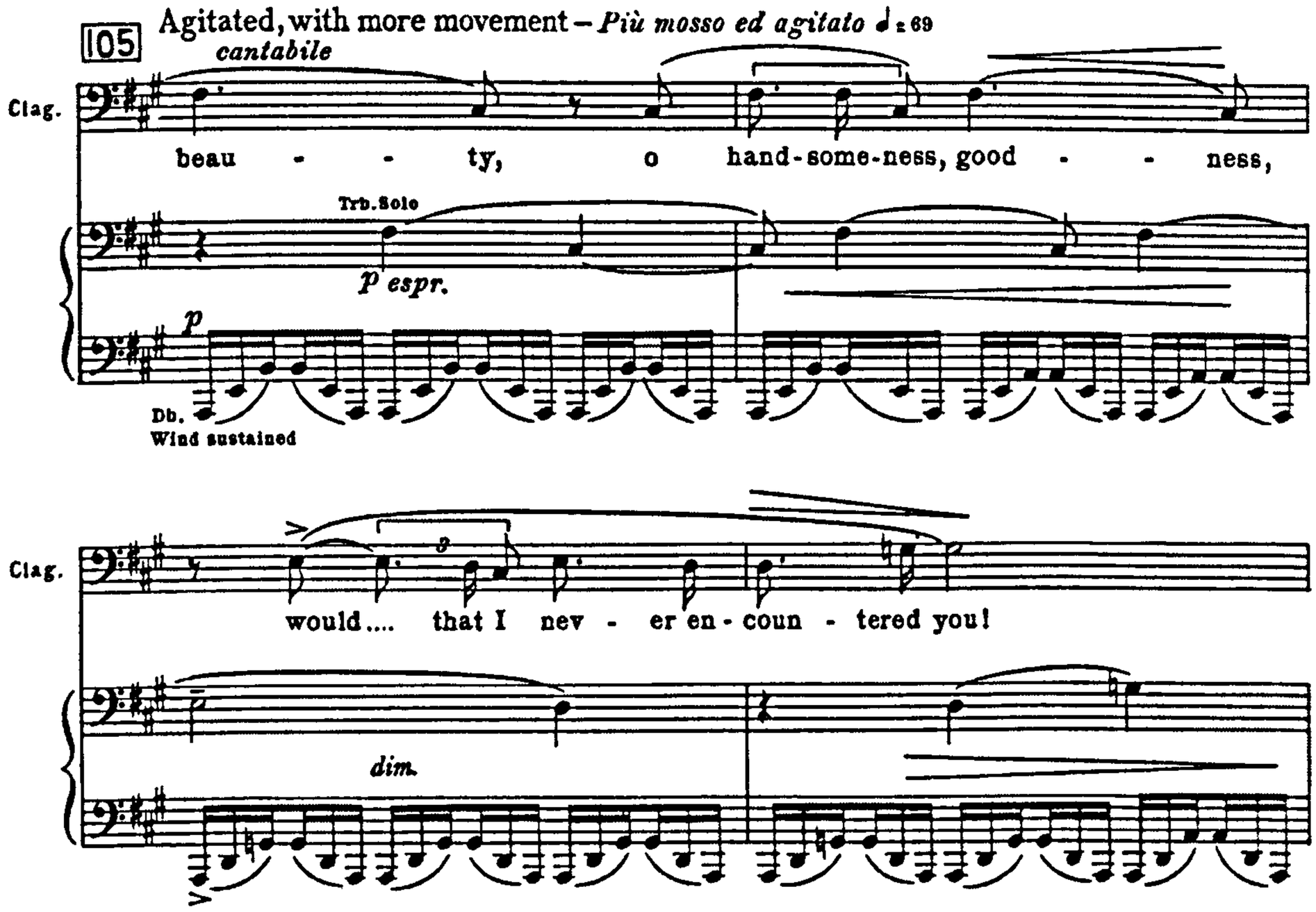
[102] Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi*, Vol. 3, p. 328.
[103] Philip Reed, 'From First Thoughts to First Night: A *Billy Budd* Chronology', p. 61.
[104] *Ibid.*, p. 61.
[105] '"[N]atural depravity" is not the same as "absolute evil." We were anxious to avoid competition with Iago's monologue in Verdi's "Otello"... and this aids us – Iago being absolutely evil, and quite chirpy in consequence.' E. M. Forster quoted in: Noel Bradley, 'The Non-clinical Test of a Clinical Theory: *Billy Budd*, Novel and Libretto', *International Review of Psychoanalysis*, Vol. 7, 1980, p. 242.

Fig. 4.6 Claggart's *credo*, *Billy Budd*, act II no. 4, p. 133.



In comparison with Iago's monologue, the A section is extended by means of repetition (A'), and an extra C section is inserted into the three-part structure. Britten's writing is extremely subtle, however, as the A" section also involves new material. A sense of 'progress' balances a sense of 'return'. Like Iago's *credo*, the scene also ends with a decisive coda in F minor, a key that consistently colours Claggart's most sinister pronouncements. Other musical signs of evil also abound: fourth intervals, triplet figurations, chromatic inflections, rising and increasingly fragmentary phrases and dark orchestration, featuring solo trombone. Ritual construction, albeit hidden, also governs the scene. Three repetitions of 'O beauty, o handsomeness, goodness', occur at the beginning of sections A, A' and C.

In contrast with Iago's *credo*, however, an important new ingredient is added to Claggart's soliloquy: doubt. The aria encompasses a complex emotional trajectory, from erotic musing to self-questioning and on to brutality, underlined by affective changes in Claggart's vocal diction. In the A section his *cantabile* oscillations between C# and F# (fourths) marked *p espressivo* are accompanied heterophonically by a trombone solo and delicate semi-quaver triplet patters in A major. The suavity of the vocal line is interrupted by a sharply accented C# - 'would that I had never

encountered you!'[106] – suggesting that Claggart is both 'seduced' by Billy's beauty and resistant towards it. As his vocal line rises to B*b* (initiating a flat-side tonal swing) he pleads for a return to loneliness and acknowledges the 'depravity to which [he] was born'.[107] Shortening phrases lead to the climax of the section on D*b*, emphasising the word 'hell'. The first glimmer of Claggart's humanity is then revealed in his ironic - 'alas! the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness comprehends it and *suffers*'.[108] Rather than destroying Billy in cold blood, then, it seems that Claggart's schemes are motivated by emotional pain, acknowledgement of 'love' and the crushing realisation that it is denied to him forever. Claggart's tentative explorations of this passion are highlighted in the A' section, with the repetition of 'O beauty, o handsomeness, goodness',[109] this time marked *intensely*.

Section B begins with an *allegro con brio* introduction, a sudden shift to D centricity, and an emphatic out-pouring of fury. From reverie Claggart breaks into self-accusatory aggression – 'I am doomed to annihilate you'.[110] He, like Iago, recognises that he has no choice: his actions are governed by fate. The *ff* flourishing chords followed by a doom-laden *fp* seventh chord with triplet accompaniment underline the affect. In rapidly ascending *cantabile* lines (like those in the central section of Iago's *credo*) Claggart articulates his intentions 'I will wipe you off the face of the Earth!'[111] and violent *ff* orchestral flourishes alternate with his unstable *pp* *crescendo* phrases. The section intensifies towards his chilling *f* declaration: 'With hate and envy I am stronger than love'.[112]

Section C is heralded by a sustained E*b* *ff* brass chord as Claggart acquiesces to his destiny ('So may it be!'),[113] his declamations once again laced with fourths. A tonal shift to C accompanies his final *cantabile* 'O beauty, handsomeness, goodness' marked *pp animato*. The memory of love oscillates with malice as held chords support his line: 'For what hope remains if love can escape?'[114] No longer a Iago-like

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[106] Benjamin Britten, *Billy Budd*, p. 133.
[107] *Ibid.*, p. 133.
[108] *Ibid.*, p. 135.
[109] *Ibid.*, p. 135.
[110] *Ibid.*, p. 136.
[111] *Ibid.*, p. 136.
[112] *Ibid.*, p. 138.
[113] *Ibid.*, p. 139.
[114] *Ibid.*, p. 141.

daemon, Claggart is revealed in all his human frailty, engendering (for a moment) a sense of pity.

Section A" traces a trajectory from hopelessness to evil conviction. With the return of A major and fourth oscillations Claggart pleads, 'what hope is there in my own dark world for me?'[115] Doubt is replaced by certainty. *Senza voce* whispers of 'No!'[116] and rising phrases culminate in a general pause, a sign of death. The coda confirms the point. Over accented F minor chords he intones his intentions: 'I, John Claggart, master-at-arms upon the *Indomitable*, have you in my power, and I will destroy you, I will destroy you.'[117] The C repetitions foreshadow his curse in the accusation scene, which is also intoned to a sinister C. Like Iago, Claggart condemns his victim to death, but unlike Iago he is engaged in a vicious internal struggle. Ironically, Claggart's *credo* reveals a chink of light in the lonely gloom.

As Forster aptly notes, while Billy is cursed with the 'devil's visiting card' (his stammer), Claggart is blessed with 'God's visiting card'.[118] In his inverted creed he is faced by a dilemma. This causes a moment of indecision, a glimpse of 'good'. (Forster's objections suggest, however, that Britten was more sympathetic than his librettist towards Claggart's 'trial'.) The moment also emphasises Claggart's homoerotic inclinations. The stirrings of love that Claggart experiences are clearly directed towards Billy: he dwells obsessively on the physical beauty of the desired 'other'. However, as Noel Bradley notes:

> Claggart suffers from his barely dawning love, which is weaker than his hate and envy. It would be unbearably tormenting to believe in the possibility of love in which he could not share and therefore he can only feel omnipotently murderous ... His inability to love Billy homosexually brings about the evil.[119]

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[115] *Ibid.*, p. 141.
[116] *Ibid.*, p. 141.
[117] *Ibid.*, p. 142.
[118] 'Crozier: Now, as against that he gives us in Claggart, apparently, the man of pure evil, the man who is evil without flaw, and I remember that the three of us discussed at great length whether this is possible. If goodness must essentially be flawed, whether in fact it is possible to have evil which hasn't got its corresponding flaw.
Forster: Well, perhaps – you mean whether God's visiting card had been slipped into Claggart?
Crozier: Yes.'
Benjamin Britten, *Britten on Music*, p. 206.
[119] Noel Bradley, 'The Non-clinical Test of a Clinical Theory', p. 244.

Claggart's descriptions of Billy's appearance feature highly in the opera[120] and tellingly, each time Claggart becomes aware of Billy's beauty he violently suppresses it. Ironically, this suppression displays the depth of Claggart's desire all the more strongly. For example, after seeing Billy for the first time he asks Squeak to 'tangle up his hammock, mess his kit, spill his grog, splash his soup',[121] recalling Melville's sexual imagery.[122] As Noel Bradley puts it: 'If Claggart had let himself feel his sexual love for Billy he would not have tried to destroy him'.[123] The good-evil polarity between Billy and Claggart intensifies the attraction between them.[124] Musically, Britten's use of A major emphasises the homoeroticism of the *credo*. The key is used to articulate similar sentiments in the *Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo*, *Les illuminations* and perhaps most poignantly at the close of *Death in Venice*. Britten thus extends and transforms the musical features of Verdi's *credo*, as well as responding to the psychological depth of Claggart's portrayal.

5. Aria forms

Britten's approach to set-piece writing in *Billy Budd* suggests that he clearly distinguished between *arioso* (small-scale lyricism in *scena*), *romanza* and *arietta*, chain-structure aria, and full aria forms [Fig. 4.7].

Fig. 4.7 Aria forms, *Billy Budd*.

Arioso	Billy 'Billy Budd, king of the birds!' (act I no. 4)
	Claggart 'I heard your honour' (act I no. 5)
	Vere 'Plutarch the Greeks and the Romans' (act II no. 1b)
	Vere 'At the battle of Salamis the Athenians' (act II no. 1e)
Arietta	Sailing Master 'We seem to have the devil's own luck' (act I no. 2)
Romanza	Vere 'We committed his body to the deep' (*epilogo*)

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[120] 'A find in a thousand. A beauty. A jewel' Benjamin Britten, *Billy Budd*, p. 41; 'Take off that fancy neckerchief! Look after your dress' *Ibid.*, p. 71.
[121] Benjamin Britten, *Billy Budd*, p. 53.
[122] Mervyn Cooke, 'Herman Melville's *Billy Budd*', *Cambridge Opera Handbooks: Billy Budd*, p. 26.
[123] Noel Bradley, 'The Non-clinical Test of a Clinical Theory', p. 236.
[124] Forster makes the 'two, good and evil, Billy and Claggart, symbiotic, parts of one whole, and actively so, seeking each other out.' *Ibid.*, p. 238.

Chain aria	Vere 'I accept their verdict' (act III no. 7)
	First Lieutenant/Vere 'Oh, the Nore' (act II no. 1d)
Full aria	Vere 'Greetings' (act I finale)
	Claggart 'O beauty, o handsomeness, goodness' (act II no. 4 - *cavatina*)
	Claggart/Vere 'Master-at-arms and Foretopman, I speak to you both' (act III no. 4)
	Billy 'Look! Through the port comes the moonshine astray' (act IV no. 1)

The full arias for Billy and Vere (Billy's act IV *aria* and Vere's act III *aria*) will be considered in relation to Violetta's act I aria from *La traviata*, before moving to chain aria and 'split aria' forms.

Violetta's aria ...

After the sparkling frivolity of the Parisian party, Violetta is left alone to reflect on Alfredo (act I no. 6). Her emotional vulnerability is immediately signified by her distracted oscillations between hope and foreboding: '*È strano! È strano!*' ('It's strange! It's strange!'),[125] suggesting delighted surprise is followed by '*saria per me sventura un serio amore?*' ('but would it be ill fortune to love sincerely?'),[126] suggesting mounting unease. Her need for genuine affection is countered by her joyous love of excess, expressed through fragmented *scena* utterance. A *cavatina* in F minor then ensues; a passionate declaration of her affection for Alfredo that maintains the bitter-sweet affect of the *scena* '*Croce, croce e delizia*' ('cross, cross and rapture').[127] This F minor breaks into F major for the little epiphany of the expansive 'Di quell'amor' theme. The French couplet form in two stanzas (lyric prototype a a' b c)[128] is followed by an agitated *tempo di mezzo*, '*Follie!*' ('It's madness!')[129], as doubt overcomes passion. Finally a *cabaletta* in A*b* major, recalling the waltz rhythms of the party, underlines her choice. It is pleasure rather than commitment that she seeks. Yet her conviction is challenged by the off-stage voice of Alfredo, singing the 'love

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[125] Giuseppe Verdi, *La traviata*, p. 58.
[126] *Ibid.*, p. 58.
[127] *Ibid.*, p. 60.
[128] Steven Heubner, 'Lyric Form in "Ottocento" Opera', *Journal of the Royal Musicological Society*, Vol. 117, No. 1, 1992, pp. 123-147.
[129] Giuseppe Verdi, *La traviata*, p. 62.

theme' ('Di quell'amor', first heard in act I no. 4) to a harp accompaniment in A*b* major, mingling with and obscuring her own two-strophe form. The tension between longing and denial is maintained to the end of the set-piece. Here, her memory in the *andante* becomes actual in the *cabaletta*, although the surrounding rapid music serves to deny it.

The generic basis of such aria forms (as well as duets, finales and so on) has been frequently discussed in the Verdi literature.[130] Views range from Gossett's avocations of the *solita forma* derived from Basevi's *Aroldo – studio sulle opera di Giuseppe Verdi*[131] to Parker's belief that application of these structures literally 'leads us up the garden path' (he believes Verdi's formal ideas are far more flexible than the *ottocento* 'conventions' would suggest).[132] It is perhaps Hepokoski's more broadly generic approach, however, that provides the most thought-provoking explanation: it is the tension between the 'conventions' and operatic 'reality' in addition to other generic resonances, such as orchestration, vocal types and rhetorical signifiers, that contribute to the complexity of Verdi's musico-dramatic thinking. Powers also acknowledges the tension between the 'conventions' and their exceptions. As he puts it: 'Verdi neither ignored the "solite forme" – the conventions of the Italian musical theatre – nor conformed to them. He used them.'[133] Violetta's aria, as we have seen, shows just this. As an extension of this thinking, Britten like Verdi (although more exaggeratedly) adapts these 'conventional' forms in *Billy Budd*, meaningfully transforming them according to dramatic and affective context.

... Billy's aria

Billy's 'darbies' scene (act IV no. 1) reflects the structural pattern of a full aria (like 'Ah fors'é lui'): *scena*, *cavatina*, *tempo di mezzo*, *cabaletta*. But the section begins with an orchestral '*scena*', rather than a vocal one. Just as in Violetta's aria, the confrontation of two opposing affects, this time by means of prominent orchestral themes – the 'Rights O'Man' theme and the 'dream' theme – sets the tone of the aria to follow. The tension between the lullaby rocking of the string chords and the

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[130] Steven Huebner, 'Structural Coherence', *The Cambridge Companion to Verdi*, pp. 139-153.
[131] Philip Gossett, 'Verdi, Ghislanzoni, and "Aida": The Uses of Convention', *Critical Enquiry*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1974, pp. 291-334.
[132] Roger Parker, '"In solita forme", or Basevi's Garden Path'.
[133] Harold S. Powers, '"La solita forma" and "The Uses of Convention"', p. 90.

staccato piccolo arpeggio figures reflects the ambiguities of Billy's emotional state, tracing a thin line between sleeping and waking. Generic allusions to the barcarolle and the nocturne contribute to the watery, night-time atmosphere.[134] The lulling I-V progressions (F major-C major) add to the swaying effect, reflecting the ebb and flow of the waters, the womb of the sea, to which Billy will return in death.

The *cavatina* in F major consists of three sections - a b a' - with three sub-sections in part B. Unlike Violetta's aria the lyric prototype does not govern the structure of the sub-sections, but the overall shape reflects the ternary nature of the other common Verdian prototype: a a' b a". Billy contemplates the beauty of the night scene, while musing over his imminent demise. Like the imprisoned Florestan in Beethoven's *Fidelio* (act II), and Jacopo Foscari in *I due Foscari* (act III), Billy expresses his grief in aria form.

Section A, 'Look! through the port comes the moonshine astray',[135] consists of five phrases, the first two of which are followed by the 'Rights O'Man' theme. Although the text is 'heightened',[136] the five-part structure reflects the flexibility of the verse. The lyricism of the words is suggestive of poetry with rhyme, but there is no absolutely fixed rhythm. (Indeed, the text is adapted from the poem that concludes Melville's narrative.)[137] Thus, the entire *cavatina* is characterised by irregular phrase lengths. However, the smooth vocal contours do follow a clear arch pattern, peaking on D in section four of this *cavatina*. The arch is articulated by a subtle dynamic intensification and dissolution from *pp* to *p espressivo* and back to *pp*. Moreover, the anguish that erupts later in the scene is already suggested by vocal A*b*s, a hint of Claggart's fateful F minor mingling with the governing F major.

Section B, supported by the same lullaby string chords, is far more declamatory. A *più f* ascent to E sets the tone, suggesting Billy's resistance to death, or at least to

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[134] Britten's frequently alludes to the *nocturne* genre. His nocturnes include: *Nocturnal After John Dowland* Op. 70, *Nocturne* Op. 60 and nocturne movements in *Diversions* Op. 21, *Matinées Musicales* Op. 24, *On This Island* Op. 11, *Serenade* Op. 31 and *Suite for Harp* Op. 83 as well as the night music in act I scene i of *The Rape of Lucretia* Op. 37.
[135] Benjamin Britten, *Billy Budd*, p. 297.
[136] Benjamin Britten, 'Discussion on Billy Budd' (1960), *Britten on Music*, p. 204.
[137] Herman Melville, 'Billy Budd', *Billy Budd and Other Stories*, London, Penguin Classics, 1962, pp. 384-385.

death without due ceremony – 'On an empty stomach never would it do'.[138] The 'Rights O'Man' theme returns, recalling Billy's first appearance on the ship and the origins of the officers' suspicions. The 'moonshine' piccolo appears once only at the end.

Section C weaves a line from lugubrious contemplation to *animato* tension and forms the climax of the entire *cavatina*. The pianissimo dynamic and *tenuto* markings lead to a progressive flat-side tonal movement. At 'Heaven knows who will have the running of me up'[139] Billy is confronted with the full horror of his situation. A rupture between orchestra and vocal line ensues as the F minor accompaniment jars achingly against the F# minor voice (sharp-side movement replaces flat-side movement), a semi-tonal dyad recalling the B/B*b* conflict of the opening. (The answer to the question 'who will run me up' has already been sealed by Vere.) With another crescendo to E, accented this time, a flurry of semiquavers from the piccolo breaks the chordal continuity.

Section D marks a shift back to resignation, but first we experience Billy's incredulity. To *pp* accented quavers he questions: 'But ain't it all sham? ... it is dreaming that I am.'[140] The reference to sleep is a textual recollection of the dreaming scene (act II no. 6) that prophecies Billy's death. Indeed, the lullaby string chords originate in this earlier scene. A *crescendo* and vocal ascent to E*b* at the words 'But Donald ... has promised to stand by the plank, so I'll shake a friendly hand ere I sink'[141] shows Billy's empathy with Donald (the flat seventh testifies to the mixed modality of this passage). Yet, Billy's naivety is also emphasised here as he realises: 'It is dead then I'll be, come to think.'[142] This acknowledgement of death is discussed by Melville, who attributes it to his status as a 'savage': 'Not that like children Billy was incapable of conceiving what death really is. No, but he was wholly without irrational fear of it, a fear more prevalent in highly civilized communities than those so-called barbarous ones which in all respects stand nearer to unadulterated nature.'[143]

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[138] Benjamin Britten, *Billy Budd*, p. 299.
[139] *Ibid.*, p. 300.
[140] *Ibid.*, p. 301.
[141] *Ibid.*, p. 301.
[142] *Ibid.*, p. 301.
[143] Arnold Whittall, '"Twisted Relations': Method and Meaning in Britten's *Billy Budd*', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 1992, p. 160.

Section A' not only recalls the pitch contours and chordal patterns of section A, but also the F major, though now flecked with minor, tonality. The key recalls Violetta's 'Ah fors'è lui' (act I), which hovers around F maj/min. The four phrases peak also on E*b* in the final line and descend to a low A. From agitation Billy reaches acquiescence. The vocal diction here is also extremely subtle; the final phrases marked *pppp dolce* lead to an affecting change to speech on the word 'twist'.[144] Dramatically and affectively, Billy's acceptance of death is also reminiscent of Violetta's 'Addio del passato' (act III).

The *tempo di mezzo* consists of an exchange between Dansker and Billy and their 'Eucharistic' sharing of grog and biscuits. The lullaby chords continue, as the first section blurs into the next. There is a 'fade' between structured and less structured music. Again the 'Rights O'Man theme' and 'lullaby theme' intertwine, but this time the 'mist theme' is also added. The loose-structure 'action' duet thus encompasses: the Eucharistic 'last supper' – Dansker's recount of the crew's planned rebellion (a sentence structure, recalling Verdi's frequent use of the form, which involves the 'Rights O'Man theme') – Billy's recollection of the mist and the French ship (with ostinati intensification in the accompaniment) – and Billy's description of the chaplain's visit (supported by 'fate' chords). An intensification arch builds through the section culminating in an orchestral *crescendo* to *ff* with sharp punctuated chords. Moreover, material from the *cavatina* recurs at fig. 110, blurring the boundaries between strict and loose forms.

The *molto animato cabaletta* in B*b* is highly rhythmic both textually and musically, consisting of alternating 2/4 and 3/4. It is the direct outcome of the ever more excitable *tempo di mezzo*. The 'popular style' suggests the bawdiness of the sea shanties, as well as the 'demoticism' of Violetta's utterance in *La traviata*. As Hepokoski perceptively observes:

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[144] Benjamin Britten, *Billy Budd*, p. 302.

> [Violetta] is deprived of grand gestures: although she does presume to enter the formal, elegant expectations of an Adagio in 'lyric-form' structure, she does so only from a lower social (and moral) position.[145]

However, while Violetta *is* disallowed grandeur she does maintain some moral dignity, as displayed in her *duetto* with Germont in act II. The same may be said of Billy, who is at once naive and dignified in his 'goodness'. Britten's adoption of the *cabaletta* form, albeit simple in comparison with the vocal virtuosity associated with Italian *ottocento* practice, however, is surprising. Even Verdi was criticised for his use of the *cabaletta*, which was often characterised as frivolous and self-indulgent. As Noske notes: 'All the invections addressed to Italian opera in general seem to fit this particular "piece": crudity, hollow virtuosity and lack of dramatic sense.'[146] Pietro Lichtenthal's contemporary response is characteristic:

> After a little Andante or Andantino *Queen Cabaletta* opens her laughing mouth and, warbling a kind of waltz with distorted rhythm and prosody, moves with gracious and languishing exclamations of *si* and *no* to the favourite minor third and sixth and, all exulting and trilling, flies in an appropriate fashion on the wings of a sweet echo.[147]

However, the *cabaletta* had a place in Verdian opera until at least 1859, occurring in operas as late as *Otello*, for example the tenor-baritone *duetto* at the end of act II. (The *cabaletta* also demonstrates vocal agility and forms an elaborate 'cadence'. Both of these attributes had to find expression in other ways in post 1850s Italian opera.) Moreover, the *cabaletta* provided a valuable vent for emotion,[148] a release for extreme passion. In Billy's case, too, it is the *cabaletta* that communicates not only his resilience in the face of death, but his transcendence of fate (and thus of Claggart) in euphoric celebration: 'But I've sighted a sail in the storm, the far shining sail that's not fate. And I'm contented.'[149] The passage climaxes with the words 'for ever',[150] set to F#-E (the highest vocal notes in the set-piece) over an A major chord, in an emphatic assertion of eternity. The *cabaletta* then builds towards a final *largamente*

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[145] James A. Hepokoski, 'Genre and Content in Mid-century Verdi: "Addio, del passato" (*La traviata*, Act III)', p. 266.
[146] Frits Noske, 'The Notorious Cabaletta', *The Signifier and the Signified*, p. 271.
[147] *Ibid.*, p. 272.
[148] Harold S. Powers, '"La solita forma" and "The Uses of Convention"', p. 75
[149] Benjamin Britten, *Billy Budd*, p. 311.
[150] *Ibid.*, p. 312.

characterised by the very static chords heard earlier in Billy's and Vere's off-stage interview at the close of act III. The sudden reversal of tempo underlines the significance of the moment, and the musical recollection of the static *tinta* chords suggests that Billy is repeating Vere's words from the 'hidden' interview: 'I'll stay strong … and that's enough.'[151]

A transition to F major then follows. This orchestral interlude (a coda to the aria) contains a multitude of themes: the 'Rights O'Man theme', the 'hanging theme', the 'working theme', and the 'halyards theme'. One again orchestral 'commentary' describes personal introspection. It is as though we experience the whole course of the opera again in condensed form. The alternation between *allegro* and *strascinato* underlines the sense of confusion, symbolising, perhaps, Billy's life flashing before his eyes. Poignantly, his only other utterance before his death is 'Starry Vere, God bless you!'[152] in the following act.

As well as following the formal pattern of Violetta's 'Ah! fors'è lui', the moment also reflects her death-bed act IV *aria* ('Addio del passato') in terms of dramatic placement and sentiment.[153] Significantly, the key is also the same, a case of what Steven Huebner terms 'key intertextuality'.[154] This suggests dramatic parallels between the roles of Violetta and Billy. Both characters are loved and lost (Violetta by Alfredo, Billy by Vere and Claggart), both pray to heaven for their salvation, and both are manipulated by a fate they openly acknowledge. Rather than suggesting the libretto was consciously modelled on Verdi's heroine, it is perhaps more probable that it was the similarity of these two dramatic situations that caused Britten to adopt overtly Verdian techniques here.

Understanding Billy as the 'heroine' of the work has important psychological implications. He takes the role of the 'female' force in the opera, as a symbol of innocence, and like Violetta and Desdemona is manipulated (cruelly) by those that love him. There is a resonance, here, with the 'feminine' rhetoric of Grimes' mad

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[151] *Ibid.*, p. 313.
[152] *Ibid.*, p. 321.
[153] James A. Hepokoski, 'Genre and Content in Mid-century Verdi: "Addio, del passato" (*La traviata*, Act III)', p. 268.
[154] Steven Huebner, 'Structural Coherence', p. 145.

scene. Father-child relationships are also explored. Billy is a foundling and thus in a sense 'fathered' by Vere within the ship's community. Such a paternal bond with incestuous undertones, a little like that between Rigoletto and Gilda, reflects Verdi's fascination with parental relationships.[155] Vere is both a good father and a bad one, a guardian and a lover, whereas Billy is both a son and a beloved.[156] Verdian female self-sacrifice is also suggested, as Billy, like Gilda, selflessly commends his 'lover' to salvation through his own death.

Vere's chain aria

After the trial, Vere reflects on his role in Billy's downfall (act III no. 7). (The set-piece is preceded by a 'Verdian fermata' to allow time for the scene change.) This moment of lyricism, as opposed to Billy's aria draws more from late Verdi than middle-period Verdi. The set-piece is a declamatory loose structure again in F major/minor, leading to a *scena* and the 'interview chords' that accompany Vere and Billy's off-stage encounter. Yet the accompaniment figure of death is reminiscent of the halting progress of the accompaniment of Violetta's 'Addio del passato', a sign perhaps that Vere has more foresight about the imminence of death than Billy. As Forster observes, 'Vere responds much more to what's going on. He really understands it. When he gets the facts, he understands everything, and Billy is always a little bewildered.'[157] Rather than middle-period form encasing late-period declamation, here we have late-period form encasing middle-period accompaniment gestures.

The F minor, *misurato* aria begins with *pesante* spread chords, underlined by side-drum rolls, and anapaestic death figures for trumpet. These death figures are strikingly similar to those found in the act III finale of *La traviata*. Death figures also merge into 'fanfare' figures to underline Vere's military sentiments: 'I who am king of this fragment of earth'.[158] Over this ritualised accompaniment Vere intones his

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[155] Paul Robinson, 'Verdi's Fathers and Daughters', *Opera, Sex and other Vital Matters*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2002, p. 112.
[156] Arnold Whittall, '"Twisted Relations': Method and Meaning in Britten's *Billy Budd*', p. 169.
[157] Benjamin Britten, 'Discussion on Billy Budd' (1960), *Britten on Music*, p. 199.
[158] Benjamin Britten, *Billy Budd*, p. 290.

acceptance: 'I accept their verdict'.[159] Death is the overriding sentiment and is accentuated by word placement on the highest point of the vocal arch (F) and the final low F at the close of the section. Again 'heightened' prose articulates the scene, and textual fluidity contributes to musical fluidity.

Section B (fig. 98) begins with a spread chord, but this time the brass repetitions intensify towards a held accented triad. This prompts a shift of diction from majestic solemnity, a sign of his worldly power, to impassioned declamation directed towards the 'other worldly': 'But I have seen the divine judgement of heaven.'[160] The line ascends with emphatic accents and a visionary melisma. While Claggart's aria (act II) focuses on the invocation of the Devil, Vere here asserts his need for Godly intervention. The *f* vocal line with *tenuto* inflections soars twice to A*b* and alternates with a smooth orchestral melody. Fervour makes way for hushed awe – 'Cooped in this narrow cabin I have held the mystery of goodness'[161] – marked by a diminuendo and a return to the death figures of the first section.

Section C is characterised by fear. Over *ppp tremolando* chords Vere asks apprehensively: 'Before what tribunal do I stand?'[162] If it is earthly justice then as 'monarch' of the ship he has acted rightly, yet if it is heavenly judgement then he has destroyed 'goodness'. The repeated C-G patterns in the bass are suggestive of a 'Rossini crescendo', and the concluding fermata allows for a sudden change of 'topic' in the following section. A *stringendo* intensifies the suspense.

Section D, marked *a tempo*, draws the terrible conclusion 'The angel of god has struck and the angel must hang'[163]. The death figures underline the point.

Section E, the final part of the structure, recalls Claggart's aria. Over a return of *stringendo* and the *tremolando* chords Vere repeats 'Beauty, handsomeness, goodness it is for me to destroy you'.[164] Not only is this a poignantly ironic pronouncement that demonstrates how effectively Claggart has influenced events, how pervasively his

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[159] *Ibid.*, p. 290.
[160] *Ibid.*, p. 291.
[161] *Ibid.*, p. 292.
[162] *Ibid.*, p. 292.
[163] *Ibid.*, p. 293.
[164] *Ibid.*, p. 293.

thoughts have infiltrated Vere's consciousness, but this is also a sign that Claggart is part of Vere's own mentality. Evil as well as good emanates from Vere himself. Indeed, this is consolidated by the fact that Vere adopts Claggart's F minor tonality. Even more troublingly after a pause for silence Vere intones on F: 'I, Edward Fairfax Vere, captain of the Indomitable lost with all hands on the infinite sea'[165] (over a whole-tone ascent in the bass). The break here acknowledges 'destruction'; the mortal threat is marked by a pause. Like Claggart he knows (and wants?) that Billy must be destroyed, and the repeated monotones are the Verdian fate motif. After the climax, effected by means of accompaniment ascent and ostinato, the end of the phrase suggests that the crew, too, are lost; that the endless sea of loneliness will engulf them all.

An *allegro scena* of great intensity then follows as a flurry of triplets and forceful woodwind phrases alternate with Vere's *f animato* declamations: 'I am the messenger of death'[166] with rapidly rising profiles. The triplets suggest panic – Vere's words interrupt the orchestral 'arch' – and the syncopations recall Verdi's *stretta* technique.

The off-stage 'interview' follows. The momentum of the scene is reversed and thirty-four statuesque chords, marked *largo*, describe the final meeting between Vere and Billy. The chords are built around the extension of the F major triad in the upper part, and the sonorities alternate between woodwind, brass, strings and *tutti*. Commentators since the very first performance have focused on the pivotal nature of this moment, where verbal communication is replaced by musical enigma, suggesting a range of responses from 'divine intervention' to an assertion of Vere's homosexuality. They may also serve as an expression of the guilt that Vere adumbrates in the preceding aria. The interview behind the stage-lit door is a crucial point in the piece, and the scene's invisibility, paradoxically, diverts the audience's gaze, but intensifies the musical moment.[167] Indeed, it may be argued that it is just this ambiguity that is central to the scene, that its inability to be translated into words increases its profundity. What has not been noted, however, is how the dynamic markings of the early sketches suggest a loose 'Dallapiccola arch' design, with the

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[165] *Ibid.*, p. 294.
[166] *Ibid.*, p. 294.
[167] Barry Emslie, '*Billy Budd* and the Fear of Words'.

climax in the third of three parts – an intensification shaping that makes the instrumental pattern literally 'vocal'. (This Verdian technique is considered in chapter six in relation to *The Turn of the Screw*.) Moreover, the *tinta* chords become highly important as a recurring theme.[168]

Split aria and 'the art of transition'

Britten's set-pieces frequently blend into their surroundings. Overlapping techniques and 'art of transition' are common, seamlessly guiding the audience orally from one scene or section to another. Britten also blurs the 'internal' boundaries of his full arias, as material from the *cavatina* or *cabaletta* invades *scena* sections, particularly *tempi di mezzo*. Indeed, Britten's forms embody a constant balance between loose and strict structures, an oscillation between reference to Verdi's *ottocento* techniques and the more flexible and declamatory style of *Otello* and *Falstaff*.

Furthermore, *Billy Budd* also includes *arias* that are split between characters (II no. 1d, II no. 6, III no. 4) rather like the act II example in *I due Foscari*, and even the fusion of aria and duet forms (II no. 6, III no. 3). This constant flexibility, as Britten plays with and develops Verdian structures, not only influences appreciation of Britten's music, but also, potentially, influences our appreciation of the constant balance between strict and loose structures in Verdi.

Britten thus embraced Verdi's use of aria in structural and dramatic terms. He recognised the aria's potential as a pivotal yet 'artificial' means of conveying profound motivations: 'Since one is in this artificial medium of music one can break into an aria which can be a statement about goodness or evil, and not seem to break the medium.'[169]

6. Ensembles: duets, trios, quartets and *concertati*

In 1951 Britten observed that 'at the beginning of his life [Verdi] accepted the convention of the times in the sharp definition of the numbers, and he balanced these

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[168] The chords return in act III no. 7, act IV no. 1, act IV no. 3, and the *epilogo*.
[169] Benjamin Britten, 'Discussion on Billy Budd' (1960), *Britten on Music*, p. 198.

numbers brilliantly. Fundamentally, he never changed this attitude, but later on the numbers melt into each other with a really astonishing subtlety'.[170] As many scholars have observed, the 'conventions' or 'numbers' found in the middle-period operas of the 1850s do indeed appear to 'melt into each other',[171] culminating in the relative musical fluidity of *Otello* and *Falstaff*[172]. Yet, somewhat surprisingly, in *Billy Budd* (as we have seen) Britten draws on both 'middle-period' and 'late-period' Verdian techniques. Thus, in his *music* Britten suggests that Verdi's operas, whether middle *or* late, rely on a delicate balance between flexibility and fixity of form. Looking at the works *ahistorically* (as Britten does in his music) rather than *historically* (as a 'development' from strict to loose structures) allows us to see the ways in which Verdi explores both the flexible within the structured and the structured within the flexible.

The duets and quartets in *Billy Budd* aptly demonstrate this pull between musical stability and instability. As moments of extreme dramatic conflict, ensembles also shape the affective as well as the formal dimensions of the opera. It is confrontations such as Billy's and Dansker's duet at the close of act II that focus the central moral and personal tensions of the work. Like Verdi, Britten reveals the 'personal' within the 'public' sphere, the 'human' voice within the wider 'political' action of a ship at war. Not only do Verdian duet and *concertato* structures emerge (both 'loose' and 'strict'), but Britten also transforms them, introducing exaggeratedly antithetical speech – dialectical 'communication' that is so introspectively lyric that true communication is precluded – and fused forms, such as Billy and Vere's aria/duet in act III no. 3. In keeping with Britten's concern for 'human conflict', duet and quartets are a powerful means of highlighting the plight of the individual in relation to others. Ensemble discourse also reveals the essence of Britten's characters: the inflexibility and even 'crudity' of the officers, the supportive comradeship of Dansker, the naive vulnerability of the 'outcast' Billy, and the 'knowing' moral torments of Vere.

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[170] *Ibid.*, p. 103.
[171] *Ibid.*, p. 103.
[172] Scott L. Balthazar, 'Analytic Contexts and Mediated Influences: The Rossinian *Convenienze* and Verdi's Middle and Late Duets', *The Journal of Musicological Research*, Vol. 10, No. 1-2, October 1990, pp. 19-46.

As with the aria forms discussed above, Britten uses a wide variety of Verdian ensemble forms, ranging from small-scale *duettini* to *quartetti* and *concertati* [Fig. 4.8].

Fig. 4.8 Ensemble structures, *Billy Budd*.

Duettino	Sailing Master/ First Lieutenant 'Don't like the French' (act II no. 1c)
Duetto	Novice/Novice's Friend 'Come along, kid' (act I no. 6) Billy/Novice/Dansker 'Billy! Hist, Billy Budd' (act II no. 6) Vere/Claggart 'There you are again, Master-at-Arms' (act III no. 1d) Vere/Billy 'Claggart, John Claggart, beware' (act III no. 3)
Terzetto	First Lieutenant/Sailing-Master/Lieutenant Ratcliffe 'Poor fellow, who could save him?' (act III no. 6)
Quartetto	Vere/Sailing Master/First Lieutenant/Lieutenant Ratcliffe 'O this cursed mist' (act III no. 2)
	Vere/First Lieutenant/Sailing Master/Lieutenant Ratcliffe 'Gentlemen, William Budd has killed the Master-at-Arms' (act III no. 5)
Concertato	Billy/Dansker/Donald/Red Whiskers/Crew 'Christ, the poor chap' (act I no. 7) Vere/Crew 'Greetings' (act I no. 9) Crew 'Deck ahoy!' (act III no. 1c)

As we shall see, Britten's transformations of Verdi's ensembles will enrich our notions of Italian operatic form.

Verdi's *duetti* ...

As Scott Balthazar observes: 'The grand duet as conceived by Ritorni and Basevi included four movements: the *tempo d'attacco* (literally the movement that "attaches" the duet to the preceding *scena*) the slow movement (often termed "cantabile" or

"adagio"), the *tempo di mezzo* (middle movement), and the *cabaletta*.'[173] As with the full *aria* it is possible to identify these *ottocento* divisions, derived from Rossini and others, in Verdi's operas (with necessary modifications) throughout his creative life.

An example of the grand *duetto* is provided by Violetta and Alfredo's 'Parigi o cara' in act III of *La traviata*. Significantly, in 1951 Britten described this set-piece as 'immediately endearing', praising Verdi's use of small-scale repetition leading to 'an effective climax'.[174] The *duetto* consists of four clearly defined sections: *scena/tempo d'attacco – cavatina – scena/tempo di mezzo – cabaletta.*

After the visceral energy of the Carnival bacchanal (which provides a poignantly ironic counterfoil to Violetta's illness) the focus shifts once again to the sickroom. In a halting *parlante* over a tense *pp* quaver accompaniment (forming a long dominant preparation in G major) Annina announces that Alfredo has returned. He appears almost immediately and the lovers embrace, their moment of recognition marked by a euphoric unison phrase that pulls the key to E major. Their reunion is followed by a flurry of ardent, alternating declarations of love, again over *pp* quavers, reaching a rapturous *ff* climax as the lovers sing their cadence together in thirds: '*No, mai più da te*' ('No force on earth shall ever part us now').[175] This, and similar 'intensification' processes may well have contributed to Britten's appreciation of Verdi's 'effective climax' building. Yet, the bliss of the moment is immediately undercut by solemn orchestral chords, silence and a resurgence of the 'sickroom theme': musical symbols of Violetta's frailty in the face of just these 'earthly forces'.

The *cavatina*, in the dark key of A*b*, consists of two identical strophes (a a' b), the first sung by Alfredo and the second by Violetta. (In Budden's terms this is a Rossinian 'old-style "similar" design'.)[176] Yet, complete symmetry is broken by Alfredo's interventions, notably at Violetta's cadence, heightening the sense of emotional urgency. Two further sweeping stanzas for Alfredo ensue, which Violetta embellishes with nuanced semiquavers, marked *leggero e stentato* and leading to an

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[173] Scott L. Balthazar, 'The Forms of Set Pieces', *The Cambridge Companion to Verdi*, p. 53.
[174] Benjamin Britten, 'Verdi – A Symposium' (1951), *Britten on Music*, p. 102.
[175] Giuseppe Verdi, *La traviata*, p. 209.
[176] Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi*, Vol. 2, p. 159.

emphatic *a due*: '*la mia/la tua salute, ah sì, rifiorirà*' ('I will/you will recover, I/you will be well at last').[177]

In the urgent *scena* that follows Violetta insists that they should go to church immediately. But she is overcome by weakness and sudden *ff* surges in the accompaniment accentuate her instability. Violetta sends Annina for the doctor and over tense held chords tells Alfredo that '*Ma se tornando non m'hai salvato, a niuno in terra salvarmi è dato*' ('If your coming does not restore me, No earthly power can save me ever!').[178] These key words launch the *cabaletta*.

Like the *cavatina*, the C major *cabaletta* begins with two identical strophes (a a' b a"), the first sung by Violetta and the second by Alfredo, leading to dialogue and an extended passage *a due*, which forms the concluding *stretta*. The rapturous intensity of the *cabaletta* is enhanced by intense sweeping lines and a gradual *accelerando*. Moreover, the *duetto* is one of conflict as well as accord. While Violetta laments at the irony of the simultaneity of their reunion and imminent parting, Alfredo urges her to remain courageous. The *duetto* ends with antithetical sentiments – Violetta acknowledges death '*serbato al nostra amor!*' ('Alas so soon to part!')[179] while Alfredo clings to hope '*Violetta, deh' calmati*' ('Violetta, do not lose heart').[180] Her fate is sealed, however, as Violetta collapses onto the sofa.

Violetta and Alfredo's 'Un dì felice, eterea' in act I of *La traviata*, on the other hand, provides an example of the 'embedded *duetto*' form: *scena – duetto - scena*. (This form, as we shall see, also occurs in *Billy Budd*). First, the scene is set with a waltz *scena* as Violetta directs her guests to the ball-room, but falls back faint and breathless. The first signs of her outward malady (tuberculosis) are revealed, acting as a metaphor for her loose morality.[181] In a declamatory style, over the delicate waltz rhythms of the on-stage *banda*, we are confronted both by her sparkling, charismatic personality and her extreme fragility. Second, the *andantino cavatina duetto* between Alfredo and Violetta is the moment at which Alfredo declares his love, introducing

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[177] Giuseppe Verdi, *La traviata*, p. 215.
[178] *Ibid.*, p. 218.
[179] *Ibid.*, p. 222.
[180] *Ibid.*, p. 222.
[181] Arthur Groos, '"T. B. Sheets": Love and Disease in *La traviata*', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, Vol. 7, No. 3, pp. 233-260.

the crucial love theme: 'Di quell'amor'. Characteristically their exchange consists of two solo strophes followed by an extended passage *a due*. But their tryst is interrupted. Gaston enters, literally breaking the spell of their amorous interaction, and lyric discourse dissolves into *scena*. Third, the dance music returns (an example of Verdi's 'festivo'[182] style) and in *parlante* discourse the lovers agree to meet the following day when Violetta's camellia has withered. A choral *stretta* (the next 'number' and a 'displaced *cabaletta*') rounds off the act in a blaze of carnivalesque sound and colour.

... Britten's duets

Britten draws on both these model duets in *Budd*, along with other procedures. Firstly, in Billy's act II no. 6 duet Britten recalls the 'conventions' of the four-part form of the large duet, split (unusually) between three characters (Billy and the Novice and then Billy and Dansker). The opening *tempo d'attacco* (*scena*) consists of a 'free' exchange between Billy and the Novice over lullaby dream chords. The fragmented half-waking, half-sleeping utterances of Billy (prophesying act IV) – 'Fathoms down, fathoms'[183] – is interrupted by the Novice's urgent 'Billy! Hist, Billy Budd'.[184] The tension between Billy's languor and the Novice's agitation continues throughout the scene.

The *cavatina* duet for the Novice and Billy then ensues, marked *allegro molto* with a slow transition between the *scena* and the set-piece. Their verses alternate, as the Novice tries to tempt Billy with coins and goad him into mutiny (in accordance with Claggart's conniving plan), leading to a passage *a due*. Significantly, the sentiments of the Novice ('Lead us if you'll lead us')[185] contrast markedly with Billy's ('Why d'ye think I'd ...').[186] Billy's naivety is highlighted again here, as in his half-waking state he does not comprehend the implications of the Novice's pact. Ironically, the onset of his stammer saves him, at least for the time being.

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[182] Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi*, Vol. 2, p. 131.
[183] Benjamin Britten, *Billy Budd*, p. 151.
[184] *Ibid.*, p. 151.
[185] *Ibid.*, p. 158.
[186] *Ibid.*, p. 158.

With a resurgence of the 'stammer theme' Dansker enters. In this *tempo di mezzo* with embedded *racconto*, Billy tells Dansker what has just happened, the narrative enriched by much orchestral 'description'. The rift between Billy and Dansker's appreciation of the situation leads to an antithetical *cabaletta*.

The *cabaletta* consists of five sections: introduction, A, B, C, *codetta*, tracing a tonal trajectory through E*b* – C – A*b* – C and finally to G. In each of the lettered sections a 'stanza' for Billy (beginning: 'But Jemmy Legs likes me'/ 'and the life suits me'/ 'Dansker, old friend')[187] is followed by a duet passage, in which Dansker attempts to persuade his friend that Claggart is not as kind as he appears ('Beauty, you're a fool'/ 'Jemmy Legs is down on you').[188] Rather than moving towards reconciliation, the duet ends with polarised sentiments: Billy's 'Here's you, old friend'[189] and Dansker's 'Jemmy Legs is down on you'.[190] Billy's antithetical discourse – utterance that appears to be more 'lyric' than 'interactive' – characterises his communication here, forming a stark contrast with Dansker's perceptive sensitivity. As an extension of his stammer, even when he *talks* Billy rarely *communicates*.

Comparison of Billy's duet with Verdian antithetical *duetti* is telling. Formally, Britten's duet, like those between Rigoletto and Gilda in act II of *Rigoletto* and Ricardo and Amelia in act II of *Un ballo*, follows the four-part *ottocento* 'conventions'. Moreover, its kinetic and structural design is similar. Balthazar's description of the Rossinian forms that stand behind Verdi's four-part *duetti* also applies to *Billy Budd*: '[In] the traditional two-level dramatic design of the Rossinian duet … individual movements are joined in pairs by motion from relative dramatic instability to relative stability and … those pairs of movements in turn combine into a larger, stable four-movement design'.[191]

In these two Verdian examples, antithetical positions are also sustained to the end of the set-piece. In the *cabaletta* to Gilda's and Rigoletto's act II *duetto*, Rigoletto's

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[187] *Ibid.*, p. 162.
[188] *Ibid.*, p. 162.
[189] *Ibid.*, p. 169.
[190] *Ibid.*, p. 169.
[191] Scott L. Balthazar, 'Analytic Contexts and Mediated Influences: The Rossinian *Convenienze* and Verdi's Middle and Late Duets', p. 21.

fury against the Duke and his vows of vengeance sharply contradict Gilda's secret forgiveness of her reckless lover. Moreover, as in Britten's duet, when the two sing together it is the lower voice (Rigoletto/Dansker) that supports the main vocal line, while the upper voice (Gilda/Billy) embellishes the line from above. (This is reinforced by the vocal pairings: baritone-bass/Billy-Dansker, soprano-baritone/Gilda-Rigoletto.) Indeed, as Britten's duet progresses, the intricacy of Billy's 'coloratura' line increases, culminating in a passionate and virtuosic coda. Similarly, in *Un ballo* Amelia's and Ricardo's 'antithetical' love *duetto* ends with musical congruence, but sentimental divergence. Amelia has given in to her desire for Riccardo (a loyal henchman of her husband), but prays for God to intervene as her strength of will fails. The duet ends: Amelia – *'O nella morte addormentarmi qui'* ('O let me end a life of shame this very day' – by implication through willing self-sacrifice), and Riccardo – *'E più non sorga il da, irradiami d'amor'* ('Our love is bright as day, oh, let our love upon us shine').[192]

The placement of these Verdian *duetti* in the large-scale design is similar; in both these operas they occur at the end of a second (central) act and articulate 'private' conflicts. The same is true in *Billy Budd*. Billy's duet at the close of act II also focuses personal tensions, around which the remainder of the opera will revolve. Billy and (the absent) Claggart are brought into opposition through Dansker's warnings (as Dansker observes earlier: 'He's too good, there's his whole trouble').[193] The position of the duet at the end of the act also creates a stark contrast with the very 'public' finale that crowns act I. Britten uses the scène to heighten the drama, to compress the spring that will uncoil violently in the following two acts.

While the crew's euphoric praise of 'Starry Vere' in the act I finale of *Billy Budd* presents the crew as a homogeneous, highly structured 'community', the second act presents them as individuals. The very next scene is set in the intimacy of Vere's cabin with his two most trusted officers: the First Lieutenant and the Sailing Master. This meeting, for the purpose of discussing military matters, is the first of many ensembles for the 'elite' of the *Indomitable*. Their significant deliberations,

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[192] Giuseppe Verdi, *Un ballo in maschera*, p. 140.
[193] Benjamin Britten, *Billy Budd*, p. 122.

culminating in their condemnatory act IV *quartetto*, highlight the fraught moral and legal implications of Billy's actions.

The *duettino* (act II no. 1c) consists of three sections: *scena con brindisi*, *duettino* and *scena con brindisi*. This three-fold pattern is reminiscent of the 'embedded' forms in *La traviata* as well as *Otello* and *Falstaff*, where set-pieces emerge almost seamlessly from the *scena* that surrounds them; an example of the 'merging'[194] that Britten observes. Hepokoski notes that such forms 'may be considered ... a touchstone of the late-Verdi style'.[195] (The presence of the form in *La traviata*, however, testifies to its presence in the 'middle period' works, too.) The officers' conversation shifts flexibly between a toast to the king and fighting talk about the French, a raucously irreverent discussion of their enemy, and finally a toast to victory.

In the first section, a royal toast is proposed, first by Vere and then by the First Lieutenant and Sailing Master ('Gentlemen, the King!').[196] Their cries are articulated over tense *tremolando* chords and their subsequent calls of 'God bless him!'[197] are layered in cascading imitation. (The captain's toast and the demotic tone of the men recall the numerous drinking songs and tavern scenes in Verdi, for example Alfredo's *brindisi* in *La traviata*, and the *brindisi* in *Macbeth* (Lady Macbeth, act II scene iii) and *Otello* (Cassio, act I).) The remainder of the section consists of extremely free *scena*, with un-measured *recitativo* for Vere and sporadic orchestral interjections, culminating in Vere's *più f resoluto* 'We've hard times before us, but there'll be victory in the end.'[198]

The second section, a *duettino moderato* in E*b* (in contrast with the preceding C), is saturated with regal doted rhythms. From the Sailing Master's first phrase ('Don't like the French')[199] it is the voices, not the accompaniment, that establish the driving momentum of the song. The potent mixture of this 'elevated' musical diction and the 'bawdiness' of the text colours the remainder of the scene. As a continuation of the *scena*, however, the accompaniment remains fluid beneath the imitative texture of the

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[194] Benjamin Britten, 'Verdi – A Symposium' (1951), *Britten on Music*, p. 103.
[195] James A. Hepokoski, *Cambridge Opera Handbooks: Otello*, p. 152.
[196] Benjamin Britten, *Billy Budd*, p. 84.
[197] *Ibid.*, p. 84.
[198] *Ibid.*, p. 85.
[199] *Ibid.*, p. 86.

vocal lines and is frequently mimetic. 'Skippity ways' is accompanied by skipping semiquaver ascents, 'beauty' is accentuated by a long arching languid line and 'bowing and scraping' is accompanied by suave, rocking quavers. 'Those damned Mounseers'[200] is repeated twice and forms the culmination of the *duetto*. The intensification of the passage (by means of a gradual crescendo, rising pitch contour and increasing rhythmic impetus) drives towards this final pronouncement. Yet the climax is suddenly broken off; the dissolution that we expect is interrupted. The men's inhibitions strike them dumb, as the Sailing Master defers to Vere for reassurance: 'Beg pardon, sir. We ought to express ourselves differently.'[201] The *duetto* may be understood not only as a 'spoken' exchange between the men, but also as a *diegetic* (half-finished) song, a drunken expression of their violent intentions.

The third section, a *scena*, then re-emerges, as the key returns to C major and Vere proposes another toast in the manner of the first: 'The French! Down with them!'[202]

A similarly fluid situation (also concerning imminent 'violence' of a different kind) arises in the second scene of act I of *Rigoletto*. Rigoletto muses over the curse that weighs upon him, and he is met in a dark back-street by Sparafucile the assassin. As in Britten's *duettino*, the utterance is declamatory. Rigoletto and Sparafucile never sing together. Their flexible dialogue, concerning the assassin's techniques and consisting of freely alternating phrases, proceeds in a highly naturalistic manner over a strict ternary form (an 'exception' to *ottocento* practice that has often been pointed out). Verdi gets the best of strict (music) and loose (singing), in a *duetto parlante*.

As well as splitting a duet between three characters, Britten also transforms Verdian forms by fusing aria with duet structures (act III no. 3). After Claggart confronts Vere with his suspicions of mutiny, Vere instinctively distrusts him. In a distracted *arioso* over fragmented triplet flurries from the orchestra he warns, 'Claggart, John Claggart, beware! I'm not so easily deceived'.[203] This loose-structure utterance is slowly revealed as a *cavatina*, a one-strophe soliloquy involving much

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[200] *Ibid.*, p. 88.
[201] *Ibid.*, p. 88.
[202] *Ibid.*, p. 89.
[203] *Ibid.*, p. 243.

text repetition and emphatic declamation. At Billy's entrance (marked *giocoso*) heralded by the staccato 'Rights O'Man' theme a *scena* ensues, serving as a *tempo di mezzo*. Billy's gushing enthusiasm is emphasised, as he exclaims (ironically in the circumstances): 'Captain of the mizzen! Oh the honour! And you telling me!'[204] Billy wrongfully believes that he is to be promoted. As he stumbles over his words in glee, Vere begins the second strophe of his *cavatina* (thematically and textually recalling the first). Their discourse overlaps to form a duet. Billy's misplaced excitement thus jars achingly against Vere's mortal concerns.

Ambiguity surrounds the duet. Vere's lyrical musing is marked 'aside' and we may understand his line as an interior monologue, a lapse into his own consciousness: 'And this is the man I'm told is dangerous.'[205] Given Billy's previous exchanges, though, it is equally plausible that Billy is talking without comprehension of what he *hears*, that he is wrapped up in anticipated jubilation, his fantasy of reality that is too 'lyric' to communicate. They are both imaginatively 'elsewhere' although physically together – Vere in the past and Billy in his hopes. Their musical interaction, though, is effective, as this time Billy's coloratura-like baritone embellishments hang below Vere's tenor line. As with the Verdian antithetical *duetti* above, the final utterances underline the disparity of their sentiments: Vere 'beware!'[206] (still obsessed by Claggart, addressing a character absent from the scene) and Billy 'You'd be safe with me. Please, sir!'[207] (a school-room appeal to authority displaying naïve subservience). However, the scene closes and Billy's hopes are shattered. Vere states: 'You must forget all that for the present. I do not want to see you about promotion.'[208]

Quartetti concertato ...

Like *duetti*, larger ensembles such as *quartetti* and *concertati* in Verdian opera often consist of four parts: *scena/tempo d'attacco*, *largo concertato*, *scena/tempo di mezzo*, *stretta*. Although Britten avoids using the four-part form in *Billy Budd*, he does allude to the single movement *largo concertato*, preceded by *scena*.

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[204] *Ibid.*, p. 245.
[205] *Ibid.*, p. 247.
[206] *Ibid.*, p. 251.
[207] *Ibid.*, p. 251.
[208] *Ibid.*, p. 251.

A small-scale *quartetto* occurs in act III no. 2, involving the officers. After the loss of the French ship in the mist they cry in frustration: 'O this cursed mist'.[209] This brief set-piece (a mini-*largo concertato*) is embedded in a larger *scena* structure, like the *duettino*, and is characterised by permutations of the creeping 'mist theme'. Verdian textural characteristics proliferate: layered entries, contrapuntal complexity and a soaring vocal line arching over the lower voices. As Vere reacts to the disappointment of the officers he, like many Verdian heroines, soothes their distress, his caressing line sculpted to calm and console them by articulating their pain: 'Disappointment, vexation, everywhere, creeping over everything, confusing everyone, confusion without and within.'[210] His ensuing *preghiera* – 'O for the clear light of heaven'[211] underlines the dramatic insight of his observations: the mist will not just cloud their vision, but also their judgement.

The *concertato quartetto* in act III no. 5 is also a single-movement form - *tempo d'attacco*, *concertato* - recalling the structure of both the act IV no. 16 *quartetto* in *Rigoletto* and the act II *quartetto* in *Otello*. In *Rigoletto*, Gilda and Rigoletto wait outside Sparafucile's house, while Maddalena seduces (and is seduced by) the Duke. Much to the pain of Gilda, she realises that the Duke's love is not directed solely towards herself. (In an attempt to cure her of her love, Rigoletto has arranged for her to see the Duke's betrayal before arranging his assassination. However, rather than ridding Gilda of her infatuation it serves to fuel it. In the subsequent scene she chooses to take his place in death – the ultimate act of devotion.) As Budden notes, Verdi's textural handling and tone colouring contributes significantly to the emotional charge of the scene, where one pair of characters never speaks to the other, but Gilda and Rigoletto react to the couple that they 'voyeuristically' observe: 'The Duke is characterised by soaring phrases, Maddalena by staccato semiquavers, Gilda by legato semiquavers with rests like sobs or by a drooping line like a wail … Rigoletto's part is more neutral, but at times his grimness is reflected in a static slow-moving line.'[212] Similarly, the handkerchief *quartetto* in act II of *Otello* concerns two pairs of characters and highly sophisticated textures – Otello challenging Desdemona with

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[209] *Ibid.*, p. 236.
[210] *Ibid.*, p. 237.
[211] *Ibid.*, p. 239.
[212] Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi*, Vol. 1, p. 505.

adultery and Iago pleading with Emilia for Desdemona's fallen handkerchief, a token that is later used against her to devastating effect.

Britten's *quartetto* begins dramatically with a crashing *ff* chord, over which Vere tells the officers of Claggart's murder with great agitation: 'Gentlemen, William Budd here has killed the Master-at-Arms'.[213] Their immediate reaction, marking the beginning of the set-piece, is consternation: 'Great God! For what reason!'[214] set against a resonant C chord (within the E*b* tonality) and insistent quaver patterns. The 'unity' of their response soon dissolves into 'disunity', however, as with delicate vocal layering the three officers articulate their divergent views. As in Verdi, the colour of each line is clearly differentiated. The First Lieutenant takes a detached and 'reasoned' attitude – 'We must keep our heads'[215] – marked *marcato*. The Sailing Master, though, is more anxious. His *agitato* phrases are in keeping with his previous pessimism and he cries aghast: 'O what unheard-of brutality!'[216] It appears that he will have little sympathy with Billy's side of events. His condemnation is balanced by Lieutenant Ratcliffe's *espressivo* compassion, 'The boy has been provoked'.[217] Once again it is Vere's line that soars over the texture, appealing to the unworldly and drawing the moral: 'Struck by an angel of God, yet the angel must hang.'[218] (In act IV he returns to this realisation in his *aria* 'I accept their verdict'.) Unlike the arrangement in the Verdi examples, the characters are split 1 versus 3 rather than 2 versus 2 and Vere, absorbed in lyric introspection, appears to be somewhat separated from the immediate conflict of the moment. We may conjecture that he is once again stepping out of the frame of the 'present' to comment in retrospect on events, while the officers articulate a plurality of immediate emotional responses to Billy's violence. Not only do the officers externalise the contrary reactions that Vere himself confronts (as a commentary on his own internal situation), but also those of the audience. The officers, like us, experience shock, and their reactions may well resonate with our own.

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[213] Benjamin Britten, *Billy Budd*, p. 264.
[214] *Ibid.*, p. 264.
[215] *Ibid.*, p. 265.
[216] *Ibid.*, p. 265.
[217] *Ibid.*, p. 265.
[218] *Ibid.*, p. 267.

Thus, Britten, by means of a *concertato*, offers a window through which the audience may experience the three-dimensional conflict that tortures Vere. And by adapting Verdian antithetical *duetto* techniques, Britten is able to articulate musically the personal conflicts that first drew him to Melville's text. Moreover, his dependence on *ottocento* forms is testimony to the depth of impact of Verdi's works on his musical consciousness.

7. 'Popular' song, the chorus and tonal design

Billy Budd is interlaced with 'popular' shanty themes, underlining the nautical location of the action. Britten's letters show that finding an appropriate text for the tune was extremely problematic. He composed the music prior to choosing the text, and while Forster and Crozier both attempted shanties, neither was deemed successful. (Forster recalls carrying 'the rhythms of the shanties in his pocket book … in the hope of providing suitable words'.)[219] In March 1949, Forster appealed to Plomer for help with the 'bawdy shanty',[220] but to no avail. Britten even proposed two somewhat surreal opening lines: 'We all went to the doldrums/ and saw a big fish in the sky.'[221] Finally, it was Kenneth Harrison who provided the text.[222] Significantly, Britten's detailed letters to both him and Forster concerning the nuances of the verses reveal his concern for rhythm, accent, emphasis and diction, as well as the order of the verses. A comment about Donald 'making mock love to Billy'[223] is also telling. On 11 February 1950 Britten wrote to Forster:

> Very happy … with your letter & with Kenneth's shanties. Most promisingly mad – I think we've got the basis of something good there. The rhythm is fine (with the exception of 'On a halter at Malta'). But we must be careful not to have important points in the last line because they get lost occasionally.[224]

Shortly afterwards he wrote to Harrison (2 March):

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[219] Philip Reed, 'From First Thoughts to First Night: A *Billy Budd* Chronology', *Cambridge Opera Handbooks: Billy Budd*, p. 60.
[220] Benjamin Britten quoted in: Philip Reed, 'From First Thoughts to First Night, p. 65.
[221] *Ibid.*, p. 62
[222] Benjamin Britten, *Letters from a Life*, Vol. III, p. 604.
[223] Philip Reed, 'From First Thoughts to First Night, p. 65.
[224] *Ibid.*, p. 64.

Your shanty proposals have been the greatest success. I have laughed over them, & so have my friends who have seen them too. They fit the music extraordinarily well, most ingeniously so. Thank you more than I can say for doing them. When Morgan was here last weekend we did a lot of work on them, arranging them in a more suitable order – according to the characters singing them – and making some slight changes. The order we provisionally decided on is as follows

a. Verse	I	- Donald
b.	III	- Red Whiskers
c.	VI	- Billy
d.	VII	- Donald
e.	V	- Red Whiskers
f.	IV	- Billy
g.	II	- Donald – which starts slowly, making mock love to Billy, & then cheers up considerably at 'for all he's a catch on the eye!'

I'd like to wait a bit before telling you the proposed changes of phraseology which the music & characters suggest – they are not major, & are certainly fluid. The beginning we thought should start more simply, & reasonably, & suggest:

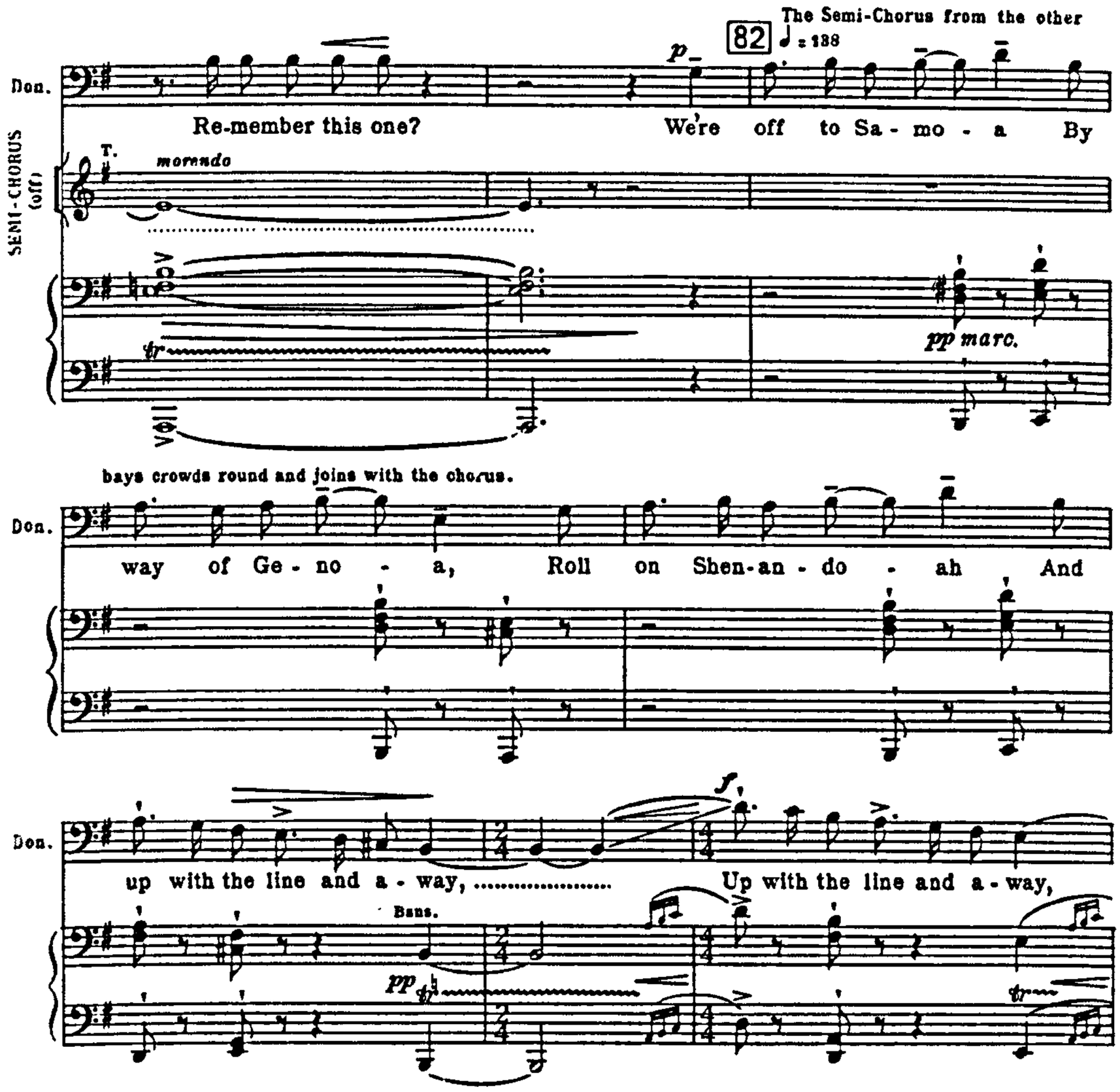
Let's sail off to Goa (or: we sailed off to Goa)
From oily Genoa
Roll on Shenandoah
And heave … etc.

What do you think?[225]

The music of the shanty recalls the rhythms of the nautical genre, as well as making stark differentiations for the singers of the songs [Fig. 4.9].

[225] *Ibid.*, p. 65.

Fig. 4.9 Sea shanties, *Billy Budd*, act I scene iii, p. 109.



This approach is redolent of Verdi's use of 'popular' song and diegetic music, for example the waltz themes in *La traviata*, the exotic songs of *Aïda* and the Duke's 'Donna é mobile' in *Rigoletto*. Yet, in contrast, the diegetic 'performance' of the song within the opera allows for a deep analysis of character, through telling manipulations of its first rendition. The presence of the shanties defines the opera's nautical location and emphasises the communal identity of the men. A network of working-songs can be traced through the opera, contributing to its *tinta* on both a large and small-scale. (Britten's use of *tinta* is considered in more detail in relation to *Gloriana* in chapter five.)

The chorus

The chorus, as in Verdi's works, also plays a key dramatic role in the opera. As Balthazar notes, Verdi used the chorus in a diversity of ways, ranging from a symbol

of social or religious identity, to a symbol of the exotic.[226] In *Billy Budd*, the chorus fulfils a plurality of functions: it contributes to the historical atmosphere through its working songs, demonstrates patriotism and political will, and participates in 'religious' and 'secular' ceremonies. In each case their mode of utterance is conditioned by their situation. Rather than the priests in *Aïda*, for example, who are consistently defined by the religiosity of their music, the chorus in *Billy Budd* swap, chameleon-like, between different modes of speech (and song).

Moreover, like the Verdian chorus, it is at times 'picturesque' and at times 'politically mobilised'.[227] It defines location – crucially at the beginning of the opera – and is also politically active. It works together with the officers in the fight with the French, yet also acts against them in (thwarted) mutiny. Violence is directed both outside and inside its community; it is simultaneously fervently nationalistic and riotously rebellious. Britten, like Verdi in works such as *Simone Boccangera*, focuses on the political potential of the chorus and its 'social' aspirations. Unlike Verdi, however, Britten uses the chorus not only as a descriptive and political force, but as a *didactic* one. In moments such as the Novice's lament and the shanties described above, it influences our understanding of events, communicating directly with the audience.

Tonal structure

The chorus is also pivotal in the large-scale planning of the opera. As the chart shows, the ship's community reinforces the intensity of 'public' action (as in the act I finale, the fight at the opening of act III, and the hanging) and provides a framework within which the more 'private' moments may be explored [Fig. 4.10]. Furthermore, the chorus frequently underlines the climax of each act, contributing to the large-scale intensification patterns within the work. (Conversely, however, chorus passages such as 'Over the water' in act II no. 4 are not signs of intensification, and Billy and Dansker's duet finale to act II is extremely climactic.)

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[226] Scott L. Balthazar, 'The Forms of Set Pieces', p. 65.
[227] Philip Gossett, 'Becoming a Citizen: The Chorus in "Risorgimento" Opera'.

Fig. 4.10 Tonal trajectory outlined by the chorus, *Billy Budd*.

Act I no. 1	'O heave'	B minor
Act I no. 1	'Sway'	F major
Act I no. 4	'Ah' accompaniment to Billy's 'Rights O'Man' theme	E major
Act I no. 6	'Lost forever on the endless sea'	A*b* major/F minor
Act I no. 9 (finale)	'Starry Vere'	C major
Act II no. 1d	'Blow her away'	E*b* major
Act II no. 4	'Over the water'	E major
Act III no. 1c	'This is our moment'	G major/minor
Act IV no. 3	'Starry Vere, God bless you!'	C major
Act IV no. 3	'Ur' (wordless chorus)	E minor – E major

The large-scale structure of *Billy Budd* also involves important key relationships. The issue of key schemes in Verdian opera is extremely contentious. While Jack Buckley (amongst others) argues that tonal relations across pieces as well as 'intertextual' tonal associations are central to Verdi's musico-dramatic thinking,[228] Powers considers key as a performance issue, something determined by the singers that Verdi wrote for rather than purely musical considerations.[229] The debate is further compounded by Verdi's frequent revisions, which often involve transposition. In relation to this, Powers proposes a middle-ground, whereby *both* key versions of the same set-piece may be said to have wider tonal resonance, creating 'split tonal associations'.[230] Drawing from this, we may usefully understand Verdi's choice of keys as dependent on a complex set of factors: introversive tonal relations (that serve structural and symbolic purpose), extroversive key associations (that suggest meaning and affect) and *sonorità* considerations that accommodate the particular vocal strengths of a singer (clustering keys around a performer's 'best' note).[231]

As Cooke argues, *Billy Budd* appears to be governed by a clear tonal structure: it is organised around B*b*. The *prologo* begins in B*b*, coloured by B-natural and the

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[228] Jack Buckley, 'Drama Through Tonality', *Atti del II° Congresso Internazionale di Studi Verdiani*, 1969, pp. 302-310.
[229] Harold S. Powers, 'One Halfstep at a Time: Tonal Transposition and "Split Association" in Italian Opera', in *Cambridge Opera Journal*, Vol. 7, No. 2, July 1995, p. 135.
[230] Harold S. Powers, 'One Halfstep at a Time', p. 137.
[231] Pierluigi Petrobelli, 'Towards an Explanation of the Dramatic Structure of "Il trovatore"', trans. William Drabkin, *Music Analysis*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1982, pp. 129-141.

epilogo ends with a large-scale perfect cadence in this 'home' key, neutralising the B-natural disruption of the opening. The tonal momentum between these two points is maintained (B*b* and its dominant F are extremely prominent), leading, in Cooke's terms, 'symphonically' to its conclusion. A far stronger factor in Britten's choice of key, however, appears to be dramatic symbolism. Indeed, Cooke observes: 'The most striking aspect of Britten's compositional technique in *Billy Budd* is his consistent use of certain keys as musical symbols for dramatic situations or events.'[232] It is apparent not only that characters have their own key areas (Vere – C major, Billy – A major, Claggart – F minor), but that concepts and dramatic ideas are tonally described (salvation – B*b*, battle – G minor, Billy's stammer – C#, for example).[233] These symbolisms work both within the abstract key-structure of the piece – F minor (Claggart) is the dominant minor of the 'tonic' key of 'salvation' (B*b*), and C major (Vere) and A major (Billy) are part of the dominant chord – and recall traditional tonal associations – C major has long been associated with purity, A major with celebration (and in Britten's oeuvre with homoerotic sensuality) and F minor with 'evil'. Vocal casting may also play a part here, as Pears's famously resonant E as Vere is accommodated by his prevailing C major tonality. Unlike Verdi, however, these relationships suggest concrete meanings, a sign of 'musical didacticism'.

What Cooke does not consider here, however, is the tonal role of the chorus. Rather than the more 'obvious' tonal relations of the central characters, the chorus participates in a highly ambiguous tonal trajectory, and its use of tonality reflects the nature of its interactions. In the opening act, the chorus emphasises the prevailing B minor area, its 'O heave'[234] unifying the scene tonally and motivically. At the command of the Bosun, however, it fleetingly alludes to F major in imitation of his speech ('Sway'),[235] a sign of their reactive subservience. In act IV no. 1, 'This is our moment' once again serves a unifying role within the G major/minor area. Just as the crew imitate the Bosun, they also imitate Vere. In the act I finale ('Starry Vere'[236]) and their repetitions of 'Starry Vere, God bless you!'[237] in act IV they adopt Vere's C major in awed reverence. However, the crowd's 'key imitation' becomes threatening

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[232] Mervyn Cooke, 'Britten's "Prophetic Song"', p. 87.
[233] *Ibid.*, p. 89.
[234] Benjamin Britten, *Billy Budd*, p. 8.
[235] *Ibid.*, p. 20.
[236] *Ibid.*, p. 76.
[237] *Ibid.*, p. 321.

when they copy Billy and his 'Rights O'Man' theme.[238] As they adopt his key of E major, the officers angrily silence them, effectively suppressing the threat of Billy's tonal 'mutiny'. As a last gesture of defiance, the chorus sets its own E minor – E major tonality in the final wordless revolt (act IV), recalling its first 'uprising'.[239] Its tonal assertiveness underlines its political intent. This is as close as we get to the dreaded 'mutiny'.

As well as a symbol of action and reaction, key is also a symbol of the crew's empathy and didacticism. In their F minor/A*b* major 'Lost forever on the endless sea',[240] the chorus not only prepares for the Novice's lament, which highlights its sympathetic nature, but also prophecies the threat of Claggart. The results of the flogging are imbued with his sinister presence (F minor tonality) even though we do not see him. Alternatively, their 'Blow her away'[241] in E*b* is layered with G major. This bi-tonal ambiguity highlights an important dramatic rupture, the gulf between Vere's appreciation of events and that of the crew. Indeed, the (dis)connection between Vere and the 'people' is pivotal. It is societal judgement that Vere dreads, and it is his desire for social approval that forces him to risk heavenly disapproval.

Thus, the crew becomes a 'character' in its own right, a symbol of community that has a distinct dramatic force, as powerful as that of the individuals who step out of it to perform their own 'private' actions. And this character, with its 'popular song', not only shapes the drama and contributes to the complex *tinta*, but conveys with startling directness the qualities of naval life.

Billy Budd is thus revealed as deeply Verdian, abounding in generic allusions to 'number' structures as well as set-piece conventions, recurring themes, popular song, and tonal design. Allusion to specific models also emerges, most notably to Iago's *credo* and the set-piece forms of *La traviata*. Yet, Britten extends and challenges these allusions through 'split' aria and ensemble forms, a flexible approach to 'strict' and 'loose' structures within set-pieces, the integration of Wagnerian 'art of transition' with 'number' opera conventions, and the combination of 'themes of

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[238] *Ibid.*, p. 46.
[239] *Ibid.*, p. 322.
[240] *Ibid.*, p. 57.
[241] *Ibid.*, p. 106.

reminiscence' with denser motivic working. Due to the pervasiveness of these Verdian resonances, and their transformations, it is in this piece that Britten comes closest to 'assimilating' his Italian predecessor's compositional voice into his own.

Chapter V

Tinta and National Identity in *Gloriana*

According to Lord Harewood, *Gloriana* was to be England's *Aïda*. In his memoirs he recalls a discussion of 'nationalist' operas during a ski-trip with Britten and Pears in March 1952:

> What was "national" expression in opera, we asked ourselves: what were the "national" operas of different countries? ... "For the Italians undoubtedly Aïda", said Ben. "It's the perfect expression of every kind of Italian nationalist feeling, national pride – but where's the English equivalent?" "Well, you'd better write one." The next three or four hours were spent discussing a period – the Merrie England of the Tudors or Elizabethans? And a subject – Henry VIII? Too obvious and an unattractive hero. Queen Elizabeth? Highly appropriate! What about a national opera in time for next year's Coronation? [1]

Lytton Strachey's historical novel *Elizabeth and Essex* was selected as the basis for the libretto, and after some deliberation its first performance was arranged for the Coronation of Elizabeth II in 1953.

Fascinating issues of musical 'national identity' arise when Britten's and Verdi's operas are aligned. Verdi's opera is at once a deeply Italian work, in terms of style and veiled allegorical references to *Risorgimento* politics, and at the same time a colourful portrayal of the clash of Egyptian and Ethiopian cultures written in the Grand Opera style for the opening of the Suez canal. It is a national statement with a rich *tinta*, or 'colour', describing the non-European 'other'; it explores its own societal identity through evocation of a distant civilization and time.[2] Britten's

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[1] Lord Harewood, *The Tongs and the Bones: The Memoirs of Lord Harewood*, pp. 134-5.
[2] Ralph P. Locke, 'Beyond the Exotic: How "Eastern" is *Aida*?', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, Vol. 17, No. 2, 2005, pp. 105-140; John Rosselli, 'Music and Nationalism in Italy', in *Musical Construction of Nationalism: Essays on the History and Ideology of European Musical Culture 1800-1945*, ed. Harry White and Michael Murphy, Cork, Cork University Press, 2001, pp. 181-196.

Gloriana alludes strongly to the English musical tradition and takes its narrative from royal history, resulting in a richly coloured evocation of 'Merrie England'.[3] But it does so using Verdian techniques. As Robin Holloway puts it '[Britten] takes on directly as much of his heritage as he can use, even though the model for dramatic articulation … is Verdian.'[4] England is expressed by means of the Italian.

Britten's Italianate conception of the work is supported by historical details surrounding the preparations for its first performance. According to Harewood, after seeing a production of Bellini's *Norma* at Covent Garden in 1952, with Maria Callas singing the title role, 'Ben … come away overwhelmed by the talent and the sheer size and majesty of her voice – he didn't always react that way to "star" performers'.[5] Moreover, Britten even approached Callas with the hope of engaging her in performances of *Gloriana*: 'He was quite smitten with Callas and the magnitude of her performance and wanted her for the projected Scala performance of *Gloriana* next season; it never materialised, as de Sabata got cold feet after reading the notices.'[6] (The critical reception of *Gloriana* was famously negative.) Given his preference for writing parts for specific singers this suggests that at least during the planning stages of the opera he seriously contemplated writing Elizabeth's part to suit Callas' vocal character. Moreover, the planned performance of this large-scale 'occasional piece', intended for royalty, recalls the openly ceremonial nature of *Aïda*'s premiere. However, associations between *Gloriana* and *Aïda* were used as fuel for the negative reactions of the press.[7] Cecil Smith, for example, noted disparagingly: 'In a large-scale occasional piece, awakening inevitable if unkind thoughts of Verdi's splendid celebration of the opening of the Suez Canal with *Aïda*, sheer decibels of sound can add greatly to the brilliance of the effect.'[8]

This chapter will consider Britten's conception of 'English' music, the *tinta* of *Aïda*, and Britten's observations about the work, before turning to *Gloriana*'s *tinta*, its allusions to Grand Opera, and its 'national identity'.

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[3] Lord Harewood, *The Tongs and the Bones*, p. 135.
[4] Robin Holloway, 'Record Review', *Tempo*, No. 189, 1994, p. 39.
[5] Lord Harewood, *The Tongs and the Bones*, p. 226.
[6] *Ibid.*, p. 137.
[7] Antonia Malloy-Chirgwin, '*Gloriana*: Britten's "Slighted Child"', *The Cambridge Companion to Benjamin Britten*, pp. 113-128.
[8] Cecil Smith, 'The Performance', *Opera*, Vol. 4, 1953, pp. 467-8.

1. Britten's conception of 'English' music

Britten's writings during the forties and fifties reveal his complex understanding of, and ideals for, English music. Particularly pertinent here is his ambiguous relationship with the English pastoral tradition and the operettas of Gilbert and Sullivan.

In an article written from America in 1940, Britten summarised his understanding of the present status of English music. He felt that English composers at the end of the nineteenth century had turned to folksong to assert their national identity in reaction to the German influence of the preceding one hundred and fifty years. Moreover, he claimed that this school, lead by Parry, 'held up [musical] progress for twenty-five years', stressing that 'pastoral' works were 'monotonous melodically and harmonically, and clumsy in form and orchestration'.[9] He picked up the theme again in an article a couple of years later, concluding: 'Like much of the English countryside, [pastoral music] ... creep[s] into the affections rather than tak[ing] them by storm.'[10] Later, he even appeared to reject the need for 'national' music altogether: 'It is only those who accept their loneliness and refuse all the refuges, whether of tribal nationalism or airtight intellectual systems, who will carry on the human heritage.'[11]

However, Britten did engage frequently and directly with the English tradition: the English Opera Group included much English repertoire in their concerts; he recurrently insisted that opera should be written for English audiences, by English composers, *in* English; and – as already mentioned – he wrote a large collection of English folk-song settings. Furthermore, *Gloriana* was considered as an openly 'nationalist' opera and was self-consciously based on a vision of Englishness drawn from historical models by Wilbye and Dowland, relating in a broad cultural sense to the ideals of 'New Elizabethanism'.[12]

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[9] Benjamin Britten, 'An English Composer Sees America' (1940), *Britten on Music*, p. 27.
[10] Benjamin Britten, 'England and the Folk-Art Problem' (1941), *Britten on Music*, p. 32.
[11] *Ibid.*, p. 35.
[12] Heather Wiebe, '"Now and England": Britten's *Gloriana* and the "New Elizabethans"', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, Vol. 17, No. 2, pp. 141-172.

Although he was open to the Italian tradition, as we have seen, operetta – Italian opera burlesqued – particularly those written by Gilbert and Sullivan was apparently rejected by Britten. Indeed, Winton Dean's and Ernest Newman's comparison of the finale of Act I of *Billy Budd* with *H. M. S. Pinafore* was an important factor in his omission of the scene and contraction of the work from four to two acts. The mock-Italian, with stock comic gestures parodying the forms of Grand Opera, was apparently far from Britten's ideal. Yet, his early operetta *Paul Bunyan*, the comic 'Italian' scene in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and his choice to produce his own setting of John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* – a notorious satire of Italian operatic conventions – suggest that his resistance wasn't complete. Moreover, Britten considered *Gloriana* to be a celebration of 'Merrie England', a theme that recurred frequently in Sullivan's work, most strikingly in his *Victoria and Merrie England* of 1897.

Britten's choice of Verdi as a model for *Gloriana* may thus be usefully considered in light of these Anglo-Italian tensions. As we shall see, he evokes England by embracing Verdian elements, but traces of the English folk and pastoral traditions and the popular burlesque are never far away.

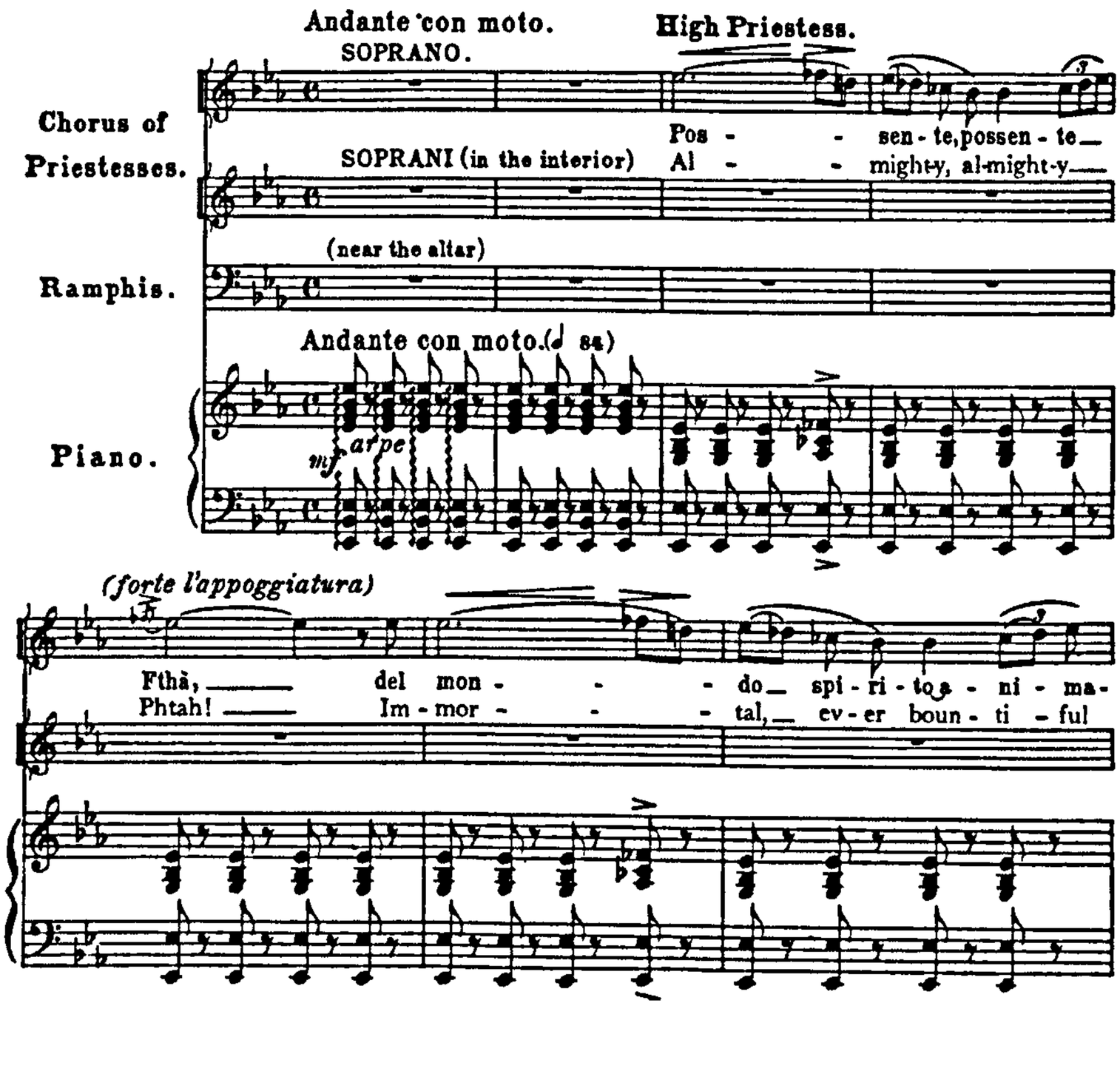
2. The *tinta* of *Aïda*

The dances of the priestesses and slaves and the ceremonial songs of the Priestesses create the most striking moments of 'Oriental' *tinta* in Verdi's *Aïda*. In act I scene ii, set in the temple of Vulcan at Memphis, the priestesses gather for a consecration ceremony involving the invocation of their Gods to provide protection for Radamés in war [Fig. 5.1].[13] The stage directions call for an altar, scared emblems and swirling incense, immediately signalling the mysticism and 'otherness' of the spectacle. The E*b* major, *andante con moto* passage begins with a series of tense punctuated chords, a figure that colours the whole scene, heightening its suspense and ritualism. When the high priestess begins her incantation – '*possente, possente Ftha*' ('powerful, powerful Ftha')[14] – her voice drips with opulent arabesques, modal inflections (C*b*s, F*b*s and D*b*s in E*b* major), luxurious triplet figures and *forte l'appoggiature*. The

[13] Giuseppe Verdi, *Aïda*, trans. Walter Dulcoux, New York, G. Schirmer, 1963, p. 60.
[14] *Ibid.*, p. 60.

chorus of priests, off-stage in the interior of the tomb, then reply in the first of a chain of call-and-response exchanges – '*Tu che dal nulla hai tratto l'onde*' ('You who have created waves out of nothing').[15] During their solemn *pp* homophonic incantations the accompaniment is silenced, exaggerating their 'distance' and also their 'otherworldliness'. The dominant role of the woman in the ceremony may also be understood as a sign of 'otherness' in relation to the gender politics of contemporary Italy. Whereas 'oriental women' were often permitted to flaunt their sexuality and power on stage, this was a freedom seldom granted to 'western women'.[16] The ritualistic gestures and 'orientalisms' thus paint the scene, immersing the audience in a fictionalised, idealised East, using potent symbols of visual and musical exoticism.

Fig. 5.1 Consecration scene, *Aïda*, act I scene ii, p. 60.



These ritual songs return twice more during the opera, forming large-scale 'reminiscence themes': once at the opening of act III – a distant, misty evocation on the banks of the Nile – and again at the close of act IV as Aïda and Radamés languish in the tomb awaiting death. The ceremonial sound thus laces through pivotal moments of the work: evoking a sense of place (act I); underlining the power of national

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 61.
[16] Paul Robinson, 'Is Aida an Orientalist Opera?'.

identity just prior to Aïda's betrayal of Radamés for her father's country (act III); and emphasising the importance of ideas of 'nationhood' in their very personal tragedy (act IV).

Tinta is a slippery term in Verdi studies. However, it broadly describes the recurring vocal contours, orchestral shading and harmonic hues that work together to form a composite 'colour' in a work. In *Aïda* the 'oriental' figures suggested above contribute significantly to its overall *tinta*. Although some of these signs of exoticism are loosely related to oriental music, however, the musical sound-image of the orient is one developed from and for the Western tradition through a lineage of operas, notably *L'Africaine*, *Carmen*, and *Samson et Dalila*. It is a Western representation of the East, far removed from the complexities of oriental music itself. Features of this invented *tinta* typically include: modal inflections (particularly Aeolian, Dorian and Phrygian modes), augmented seconds and fourths, parallel fourths and fifths, arabesques, sliding chromaticism, trills and dissonant grace notes, *ad libitum* sections, melodies with narrow range, repetitive rhythms, double reed timbres, and 'exotic percussion' (tambourine and bells).[17] As Verdi famously observed, 'to copy reality can be a good thing, but to invent reality is better, much better'.[18]

In addition to the consecration scenes, Verdi's dance scenes paint the opera's distant location. Just after the initial invocations of the priestess, priests and Ramphis, in the above scene, the priestesses dance. The *allegretto* orchestral passage abounds in trills, acciaccaturas, triplet figures and insistently repeated motifs. Neapolitan chords on scale steps 2 and 6 frequently colour the dance, and the small-scale rhythmic repetitions are coupled with larger scale repetitions to form a complex binary structure: A A B C C' D D | A B C E. The repetitions are not quite as regular as they may appear, however, as Verdi off-sets the four-square structure by integrating 3- as well as 4-bar phrases in sections B and C', and in sections B and C in the second half. Just as he defies expectations rhythmically he also does so dramatically. Due to the association of 'oriental' dance with seduction the scene incorporates a heady clash of the sacred and the profane: the priestesses utter their invocations to the Gods while simultaneously providing an 'erotic' spectacle.

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[17] Derek B. Scott, 'Oriental and Musical Style', *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 82, No. 2, 1998, p. 327.
[18] Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi*, Vol. 3, p. 10.

Later in the same scene comes the dance of young Moorish slaves. Here a double layer of 'otherness' is created, as the girls are not only 'other' to the audience, but also 'other' to their Egyptian captors. However, the sonic 'orientalisms' of their music – copious grace-notes, ostinato figures and harmonic inflections (F#, D*b* and A, in B*b* major) – are barely distinguishable from the devices used to represent the priestesses; a sign that 'otherness' is normalised, a pan-Eastern colour that is constructed for the pleasure of distant gaze. The Ballabile for dancing girls within the act II finale celebrating Egypt's conquest is similarly tinted. Verdi's musicalisation of 'otherness' thus has complex and troubling political resonances. Indeed, Edward Said argues that Verdi's portrayal of the East may be understood as an attempt to reinforce ideas of 'colonial' control.[19] Conversely, Robinson suggests that the work highlights Ethiopia's vulnerability before the tyranny of Egypt. Even further, Locke proposes that Verdi criticises 'colonialisation' through a distanced critique of oppressive power.[20] These contrary interpretations highlight the ambiguities inherent in Verdi's representation of the 'exotic', which suggests both 'domination' and 'celebration' of the 'other'.

Verdi's *tinta* is not merely a simple application of clichés, however. There is some distinction created between the Egyptian and Ethiopian *tinte*, the former brightly coloured and the latter consisting of more subtle timbral hues.[21] Moreover, the Ethiopian versus Egyptian sound worlds are joined by a third: 'Western opera'.[22] In the more intimate scenes, particularly arias, for example Radamés's 'Celeste Aïda' in act I, delicacy of instrumental colour is coupled with an extremely Italian style construction; his interior landscape is 'Italianised'. Thus, the clearly 'exotic' moments, the diegetic riots of aural and visual colour, become a patchwork with arias and more intimate scenes in which Verdi's 'Western voice' comes to the fore.

Britten identified Verdi's orchestration as a pivotal element of *tinta* in *Aïda* in 1951:

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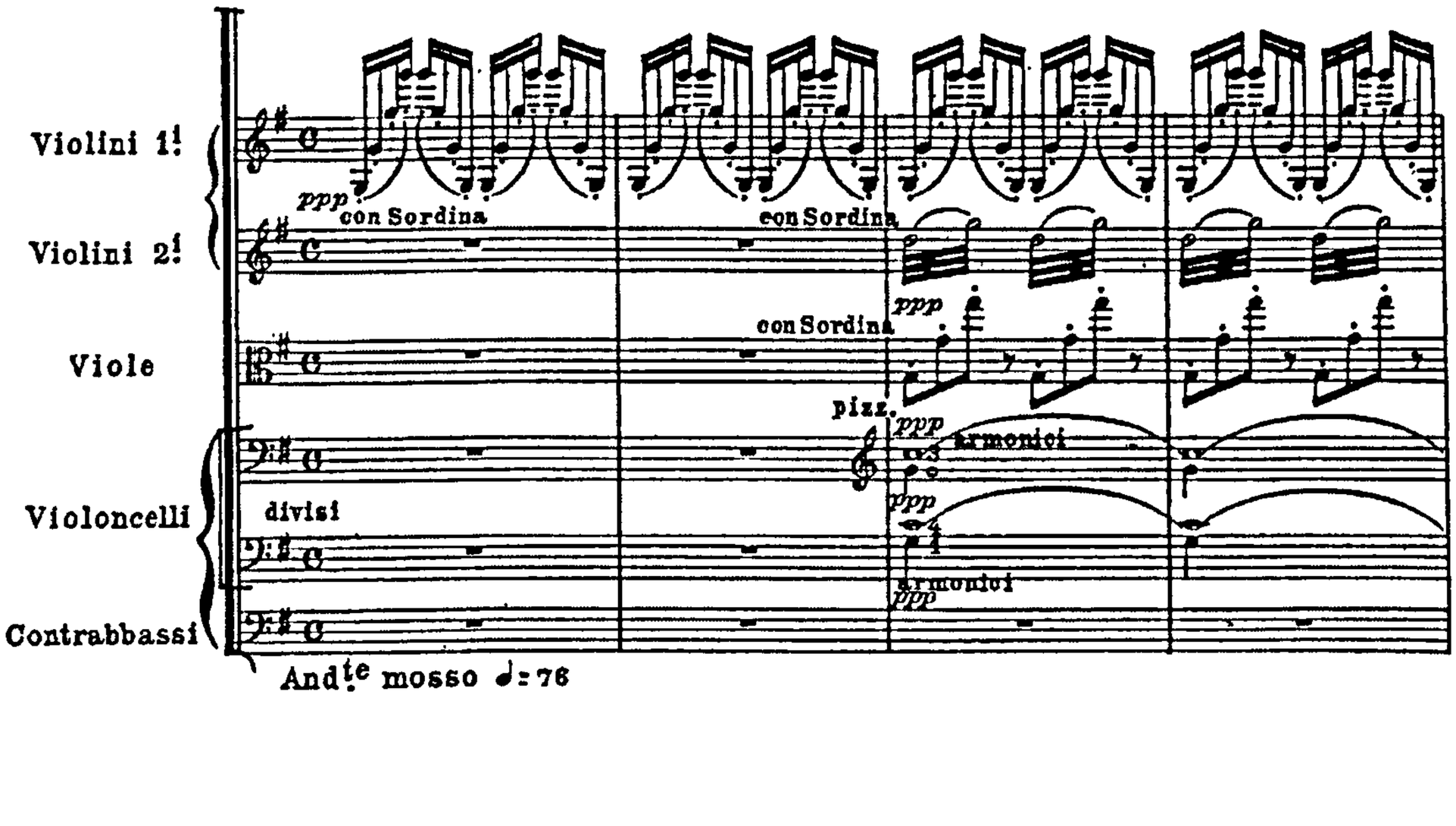
[19] Edward Said, 'The Empire at Work: Verdi's *Aïda*', *Culture and Imperialism*, London, Vintage Books, pp. 133-159.
[20] Ralph P. Locke, 'Beyond the Exotic: How "Eastern" is *Aida*?', pp. 105-140.
[21] Fabrizio Della Seta, '"O cieli azzurri": Exoticism and Dramatic Discourse in "Aida"', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 1991, p. 55.
[22] Paul Robinson, 'Is Aida an Orientalist Opera?', pp. 135-136.

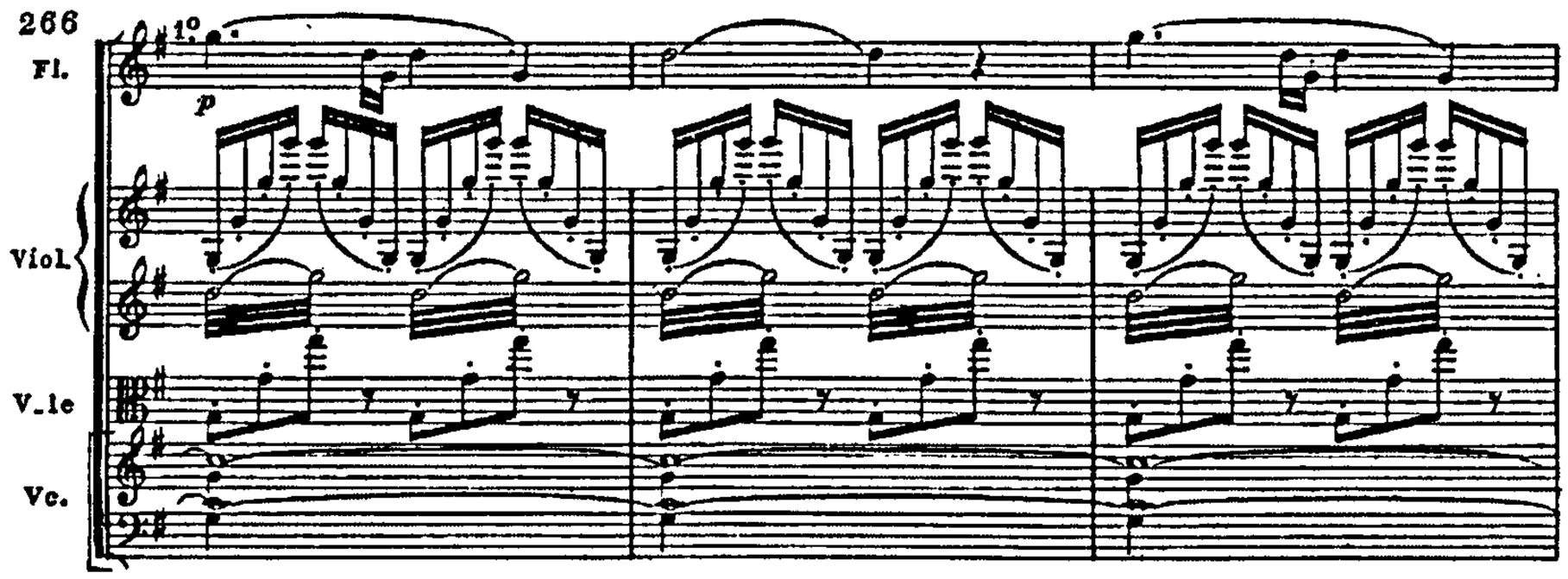
> [Verdi's] attitude to the voices on the stage and the orchestra ... seems to me to be perfectly right. The voices dominate, and the orchestra is the background – but what a background! In the later works especially, the orchestra has a range of colours wider than with any other composer. For soft shading, the *Nile* scene in *Aïda* is inimitable.[23]

The opening of the third act by the Nile is characterised by *ppp* utterance and semiquaver octave patterns on G for the first violins, *con sordina*. The lower strings then enter: second violins with *tremolandi*, violas with quaver octave patterns and the cellos *divisi* with sustained chords and harmonics. (According to Francis Travis, Verdi's use of such harmonics was very rare before *Aïda*.)[24] The delicacy of the colour is enhanced by the luminous tone of the flute, which provides the melody within the texture, the upper strings rising to high G in sonorous octaves. Low flute trills give an extra, almost 'otherworldly' impression to the scene [Fig. 5.2].

Fig. 5.2 The Nile scene, *Aïda*, Act III scene i, pp. 265-266.



[23] Benjamin Britten, *Britten on Music*, p. 102.
[24] Francis Irving Travis, *Verdi's Orchestration*, Zürich, Juris-Verlag, 1956.



Furthermore, Verdi integrates six 'Egyptian' trumpets (three in A*b* and three in B) and *banda* (military band) into his scoring.[25] The Egyptian trumpets give visual as well as aural colour, a sign of 'mock-authenticity' also suggested by the attention to detail given the original costume designs.[26] Furthermore, the *banda*, consisting of two harps, six Egyptian trumpets, four orchestral trumpets, four trombones and bass drum, is a striking feature in the processional and tomb scenes. As Travis highlights, not only are these moments of on-stage music used to paint the ceremony, but the groups engage in a 'musical dialogue with the regular orchestra'.[27] The spatial placement of the instruments contributes to the 'sonic exchange', with aural matching and mis-matching adding layers of complexity.

This interplay is prominent in the 'Egyptian trumpet tune' in the act II finale where the Egyptian troops return in victory to process before the king. The fanfare melody – held by the Egyptian trumpets in A*b* – is at first supported by the *banda*. As usual the *banda* part is written as a short piano-score for the instrumentalists to distribute as appropriate. At fig. D the Egyptian trumpets in B enter to block chords from the remainder of the orchestra. The theme is then supported by the strings of the pit orchestra. Twelve bars later both sets of Egyptian trumpets play together, and at the end of the section the *banda* returns. Not only is this a cumulative structure – it gradually builds towards the climax in which all the instruments, on-stage and off-stage, are sounding – but the middle section is shaped by a sudden switch to orchestra, marking a re-integration of the orchestra with the 'Egyptian instrumentalists'. Verdi, thus, creates a dialogue between two distinct (authorial?) 'voices'. This play with

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[25] Francis Irving Travis, *Verdi's Orchestration*, p. 30.
[26] Paul Robinson, 'Beyond the Exotic: How "Eastern" is *Aida*?'
[27] Frances Irving Travis, *Verdi's Orchestration*, p. 53.

overlapping and spatially distributed instrumental groups is shared by the dance scenes in *Gloriana*.

Furthermore, the harmonic colour of the 'Egyptian trumpet theme' was highlighted for praise by Britten:

> Verdi has the gift, which only the very greatest have had: that of writing a succession of the simplest harmonies in such a way as to sound surprising and yet 'right'. The accompaniment to the Egyptian trumpet tune in *Aïda* is an extreme example of this.[28]

The trumpet theme is at first sight an apparently simple orchestral gesture, built on a quasi-military theme. The structure of the section – a a' b a' a" a'" c (with b harmony) d (with a' harmony) – is clear-cut and regular, and consists of a transparent theme and accompaniment texture. Moreover, each section is built up predominantly of I, IV, V and vi chords in repeated cadential patterns. Frequent 'colour chords', however, subvert the impression of simplicity. In the recurring 'a' sections, a D*b* is repeatedly added to chord I forming a *b*7 in the prevailing tonality. Furthermore, in the a" and a'" sections there is a swift and unexpected modulation to B major, the sharpened dominant of E*b*, forming an overall ternary structure. This move is understandable, however, if the keys of the trumpets are taken into account; their tuning to A*b* and B influences the tonal direction of the piece. It is perhaps Verdi's delicate harmonic shading and daring central modulation that Britten found so striking. Indeed, it matches very well with his enthusiasm for creating complexity within apparent simplicity.[29]

3. The *tinta* of *Gloriana* and Britten's 'Neo-Elizabethanism'

Gloriana contains many allusions to Verdian processes: it is a clear 'number' construction with section titles added by Britten (suggesting a link with Verdi's middle-period use of structural conventions), its overall form and placement of finales invokes 'Grand Opera' pacing, and it abounds in Italianate vocal lines. Most notable, however, is its colour. As in *Aïda*, diegetic music – songs, choruses – and

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[28] Benjamin Britten, 'Verdi – A Symposium' (1951), *Britten on Music*, p. 102.
[29] Donald Mitchell, 'The Paradox of *Gloriana*: Simple and Difficult', *Britten's Gloriana*, ed. Paul Banks, Woodbridge, The Boydell Press, 1993, pp. 67-76.

opportunities for spectacle – a masque and dances – form the backdrop to an intensely personal drama.

The Elizabethan temporal and national setting is frequently evoked through the presence of diegetic music: the two lute songs, the dance scene, the masque and the songs of the ballad singer. And Britten creates a very 'English' colour through musical allusions to his own heritage. He evokes an 'idealised' past, but nonetheless one that resonates with tangible models, based on a close and careful study of *real* repertoire. The libretto, modelled on Lytton Strachey's narrative, too, draws copiously from historical accounts.[30] In this sense, the opera accords with the ideas of the Neo-Elizabethan movement, which 'declared a revitalising resonance between England's Golden Age and the dawning era of Elizabeth II'.[31] However, Britten's heart-wrenching portrayal of Elizabeth's personal dilemma challenges this tendency towards 'idealism', as does his complex treatment of his musical models.[32]

Aptly, Britten and Pears had a long standing enthusiasm for Elizabethan repertoire. The Aldeburgh Music Festival, begun in 1948, was characterised by a strong bias towards early music, particularly choral works performed by the English Opera Group. Tellingly, the most-performed composers at the Aldeburgh Festival during Britten's lifetime included Purcell and Dowland.[33] Moreover, Imogen Holst and Rosamund Strode, two pivotal assistants to Britten, were both Baroque specialists.[34] Britten's and Pears's collection of early music scores was also extensive. Fig. 5.3 shows the scores by John Dowland and John Wilbye that Britten annotated. (Both composers are directly evoked in *Gloriana*.) His markings include numerous subtle dynamic indications. Moreover, the 'theatrical drawings' that he adds to the score of Dowland's 'If my complaints could passions move' suggest that he responded to the dramatic potential of the madrigals – even if they were added as part of a childish prank [Fig. 5.4].

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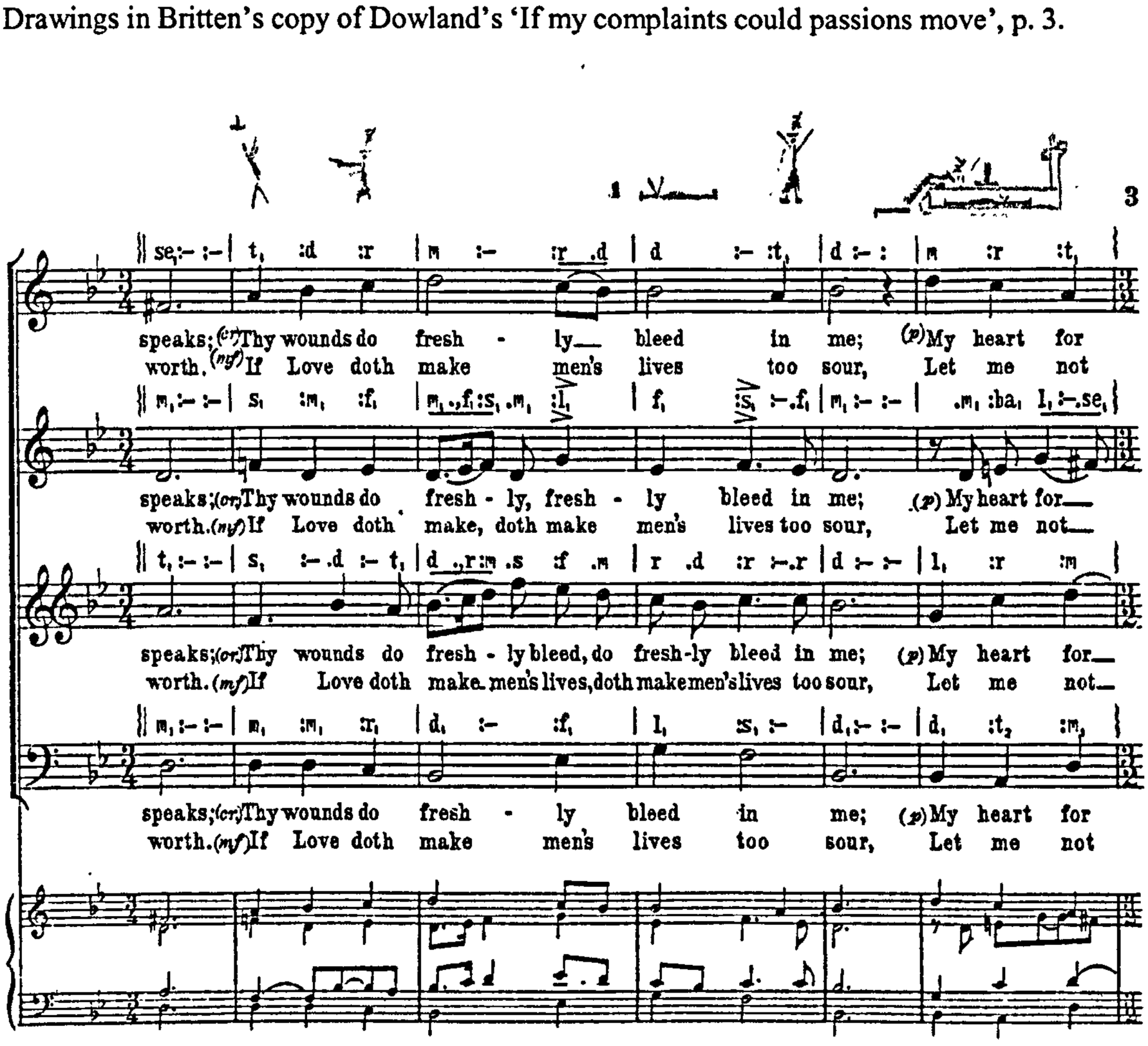
[30] William Plomer 'Notes on the Libretto of Gloriana', *Britten's Gloriana*, p. 100. 'The prayer at the end of act one, scene two, is a conflation and adaptation of passages from prayers composed by the Queen in several languages, and her speech to the audience almost at the end of the last scene of all is derived from her so-called Golden Speech to Parliament.' *Ibid.*, p. 101.
[31] Heather Wiebe, '"Now and England": Britten's *Gloriana* and the "New Elizabethans"', p. 147.
[32] *Ibid.*, p. 147.
[33] Judith LeGrove, 'Aldeburgh', *The Cambridge Companion to Benjamin Britten*, p. 310.
[34] *Ibid.*, p. 311.

Fig. 5.3 Britten and Pears's Elizabethan music collection.

John Wilbye	'Happy, O happy he' from Madrigal Set 2	1924	Cover signed by Britten, with pencil annotations and drawings in the score.
John Wilbye	'Love me not for my comely grace' from Madrigal Set 2	1925	Cover signed by Britten.
John Wilbye	'Sweet honey sucking bees' from Madrigal Set 2	1927	Cover signed by Britten, with pencil annotations and drawings in the score.
John Dowland	'Lachrimae antique'	n.d.	Cover signed by Britten, with pencil annotations in the score.
John Dowland	'If my complaints could passions move' from Songes or Ayres Book 1 No. 4	1925	Cover signed by Britten, with pencil annotations and drawings in the score.
John Dowland	Fifty Songs	n.d.	Annotated by Pears and Britten.

Fig. 5.4 Drawings in Britten's copy of Dowland's 'If my complaints could passions move', p. 3.



Britten's enthusiasm for Elizabethan music, the lute-songs of Dowland in particular, is confirmed by his compositions: *Lachrymae* Op. 48 (1950) for viola and piano, later arranged for viola and string orchestra (based on Dowland's 'If my complaints could passions move' from the *First Booke of Songes and Ayres* (1597) No. 4, and 'Flow my tears' from the *Second Booke of Songs or Ayres* (1600) No. 2) and *Nocturnal after John Dowland* Op. 70 (1963) for guitar (based on 'Come, heavy sleep' from Dowland's *First Booke of Songes and Ayres* (1597) No. 20). Both pieces are 'reverse' theme and variation forms in which the models emerge gradually to be fully revealed in their final sections.

Evocation of Dowland's music is also a focus in *Gloriana*. In act I scene ii, Elizabeth instructs Essex to soothe her with a lute song as she is ensconced in her apartments lamenting the cares of state. This plea for song-within-opera (a sign of vocal self-consciousness and diegesis) takes the form of two songs, the first quick and gay and the second melancholy. The first lute song aims to cheer the queen through liveliness: 'Quick music is best when the heart, the heart is oppressed'.[35] This is an example of over-determination, where the quick music is also 'labelled' by the song text. (This emphasis, even overemphasis, of the music's historical genre and character through textual description occurs again in the dance scene.) The song is in a simple binary form with an a a' b c phrase structure. It moves between E major and F major and incorporates colourful E*b* inflections (*b*2) in the F major section. With its syncopations, large leaps and 'hal-la-loo, hal-la-lay'[36] chorus, the song alludes strongly to Elizabethan lute songs in general, and those of Dowland in particular. Moreover, another sixteenth-century resonance is present, as the phrase 'Quick music is best' is derived from a madrigal by John Hilton entitled 'The Nest from my Noddle'.

Britten's use of Elizabethan models, though, only goes so far. The accompaniment to the song is an orchestral one, *not* a lute or a guitar, and sustained strings with harp arpeggios are used to give the impression of a lute, to 'reinvent' the delicate plucking sonority. This fantasy-lute, and the shimmering quality of the tremolando violin chords later, creates the effect of hearing the music 'through the

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[35] Benjamin Britten, *Gloriana*, London, Boosey & Hawkes, 1953, p. 59.
[36] *Ibid.*, p. 59.

mists of time'. In addition, Britten layers the song with two dissonant pedal points: E*b* in the E major section and E-natural in the F major section. These jarring dyads at the second suggest unease and have been interpreted as reminders of Elizabeth's cares, unabated by the façade of frivolity provided by the lute song; the tension between the torments of her inner life and Essex's musical expression.[37] In relation to *tinta* these pedal undertows, played by the double basses, are particularly interesting as they constitute the layering of one colour with another, resulting in a clash that creates an altogether different affective colour: disquiet. There is a suggestion that for Elizabeth simple happiness is unattainable. It is interesting to note, too, that many of Britten's evocations of Elizabethan musical forms here end with, or overlap with, other music, for example the dances in act II. These instances of quasi-'cinematic' fading (or even the 'auralisation' of filmic cross-fading) often lead to distortion, as the music evocative of the 'past' is literally heard *through* the orchestra, highlighting the historical distance of Britten's models and subverting their naivety.

The second lute song is a ternary form moving through C minor to C major and then back to C minor (with many modal A-naturals). Here, the 'lament' style of Dowland is clearly invoked by the sighing, falling gestures and expressive sighs of English melancholy.[38] The strumming accompaniment of the previous song returns, although this time without any dissonant pedal, suggesting that this song's sadness resonates more profoundly with Elizabeth's internal landscape. Another sign of Britten's 'Neo-Elizabethanism' is the word painting, for example the ritualistic repetitions of 'when he dies'[39] and the falling gestures of 'sleep, sleep, secure'.[40] The quasi-authenticity of this approach is heightened by the origins of the text for this section – derived from one of Essex's own poems – and the opening vocal-line quotation from 'O Happy He' by John Wilbye [Fig. 5.5].[41] While the model is invoked directly, however, the line is highly ornamented [Fig. 5.6].

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[37] Arnold Whittall, *The Music of Britten and Tippett*, p. 148.
[38] Robin Headlam Wells, *Elizabethan Mythologies: Studies in Poetry, Drama and Music*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 190; Leeman L. Perkins, *Music in the Age of the Renaissance*, London, W. W. Norton & Company, 1999, pp. 703-723.
[39] Benjamin Britten, *Gloriana*, p. 63.
[40] *Ibid.*, p. 62.
[41] David Brown, *Wilbye*, London, Oxford University Press, 1974, p. 42.

Fig. 5.5 Britten's copy of Wilbye's 'Happy, o happy he', p. 1.

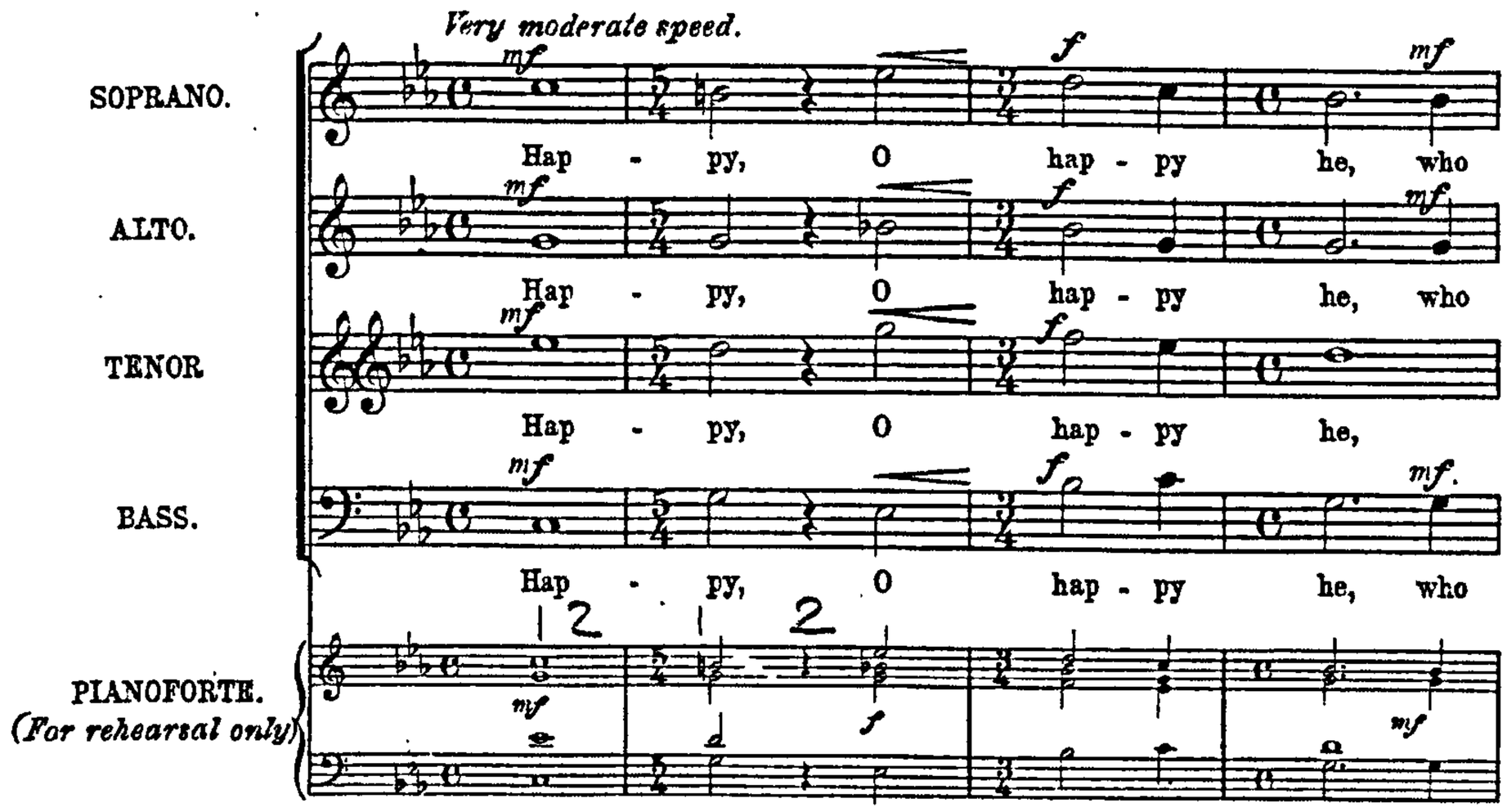
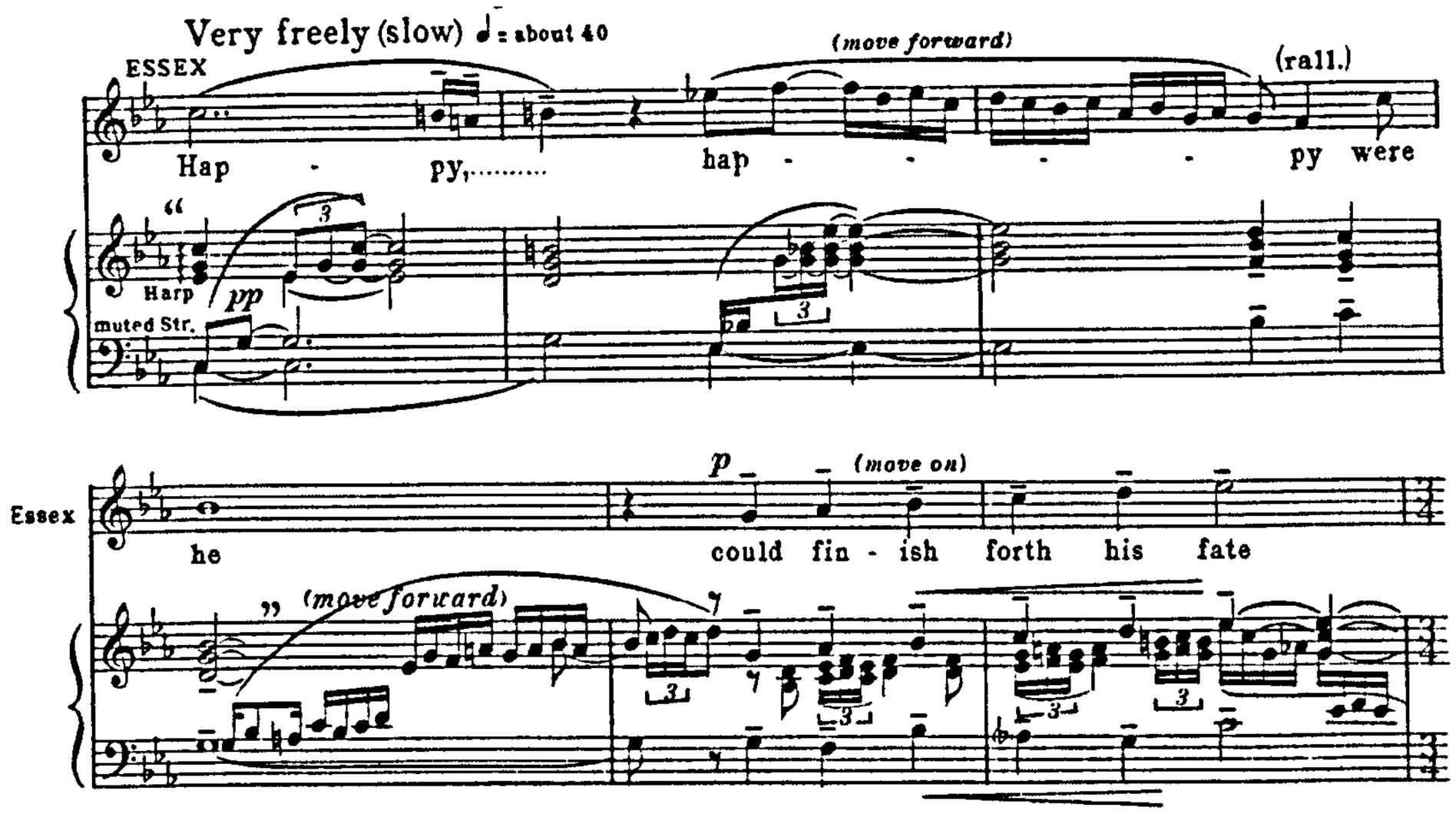


Fig. 5.6 Second Lute Song, *Gloriana*, act I scene ii, p. 61.



This intricacy suggests the idiomatic ornamentation of such 16th-century songs, but also the conflation of lute and vocal gestures. Indeed, at the close of the song the lute and voice utter alternate semiquaver patterns, forming a balanced 'duet', the timbres melding into one another. Thus, even where Britten invokes a clear model, his manipulation of the genre is far from simple.

Thus, just as Strachey's account is as fantastic as it is factual Britten's allusions are not intended as *imitations*. (They are also anachronistic as Dowland wasn't composing until after Elizabeth's death and in terms of 'national style' the lute song

and madrigal models are themselves Italianate.)[42] Britten was very weary of being labelled a 'pastiche' composer, and in an interview before the premiere he was careful to justify himself: 'I have always been interested in the period, and have thought a great deal about it to try to get the atmosphere. But I have not "half-timbered" my music.'[43] Imogen Holst recalled in her diary on 8 October 1952: 'When I said he'd got the right Elizabethan flavour with contemporary materials he said I was to swear to tell him directly it began to turn into a pastiche.'[44] In addition, Britten commented to Lord Harewood: 'It's got to be serious. I don't want to do just folk dances and village green stuff.'[45] This defensiveness, however, betrays a tension inherent in the score: the pull between obvious imitation and invention. At times his music *does* border on just the pastiche that he aimed to avoid. Yet, this tendency is part of the theatricality of the work, which prompts its grand opera resonances. And, crucially, 'imitation' is frequently subverted by self-conscious gestures that reveal the inherent artificiality of his 'Elizabethanised' utterance.

The dance scene in act II scene iii exemplifies this tension between allusion and re-invention. Here, Britten constructs the scene as a sequence of dances interspersed by dialogue (marked as 'conversation' in the score) and a dramatic quartet and victory hymn, very similar to Verdi's construction of the act II finale in *Aïda* [Fig. 5.7].

Fig. 5.7 Dance scene, *Gloriana*, act II scene iii.

Act II Scene iii No. 1	120	**Dance: Pavan**	*Quick and energetic*	**Pavane (2/2)**
No. 2	122	Scena Lady-in-waiting, Penelope Rich, Mountjoy, Lady Essex, Essex, Master of Ceremonies, chorus		**Conversation**

[42] James Day, *'Englishness' in Music: From Elizabethan Times to Elgar, Tippett and Britten*, London, Thames Publishing, 1999, p. 17; Alfred Einstein, 'The Elizabethan Madrigal and "Musica Transalpina"', *Music & Letters*, Vol. 25, No. 2, 1944, pp. 66-77; Joseph Kerman, 'Elizabethan Anthologies of Italian Madrigals', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, Vol. 4, No. 2, 1951, pp. 12-138; Lillan Ruff and Arnold Wilson, 'The Madrigal, the Lute Song and Elizabethan Politics', *Past and Present*, No. 44, 1969, pp. 3-51.
[43] Antonia Malloy-Chirguin, '*Gloriana*: Britten's "Slighted Child", *The Cambridge Companion to Benjamin Britten*, p. 124.
[44] Humphrey Carpenter, *Benjamin Britten: A Biography*, p. 311.
[45] Robert Hewison, '"Happy Were He": Benjamin Britten and the Gloriana Story', *Britten's Gloriana*, p. 13.

		'Pavanes so grave and dignified'		
No. 3	125	**Dance: Galliard**	*Gently flowing*	**Galliard (6/2)**
No. 4	127	Scena Elizabeth, Master of ceremonies, chorus 'Graceful gliding'		**Conversation and the Queen's entrance**
No. 5	129	**Dance: Lavolta**	*Quick and rhythmic*	**Lavolta (6/4)**
No. 6	132	Scena Elizabeth, chorus 'Lusty leaping'		**Conversation**
No. 7	133	**Dance: Morris**	*Quick*	**Morris Dance (4/4)**
No. 8	135	Recitative Penelope Rich, Lady Essex 'Frances, so plain now?'		**Recitative**
No. 9	136	**Scena e Dance** Elizabeth, Lady Essex 'Well, ladies'	*Slowly and heavily*	**The Queen's Burlesque (3/4)**
No. 10	138	Quartetto Penelope Rich, Lady Essex, Essex, Mountjoy, Master of ceremonies 'Good Frances, do not weep'	*Slowly moving, but very freely*	**Quartet**
No. 11	143	**March**	*Lively marching tempo*	**March (4/2)**
No. 12	144	Scena Raleigh, Elizabeth, Essex 'My lord of Essex'		**The Queen's Announcement**
No. 13	147	Concertato e Victory Hymn Elizabeth, Cecil, Raleigh, Penelope Rich, Lady Essex, Mountjoy, Essex, Master of Ceremonies, chorus 'Victor of Cadiz'	*Broadly and rhythmically*	**Ensemble**
No. 14	155	**Dance: Coranto**	*Quick*	**Coranto (6/4)**

The *tinta* of this section is created through a patchwork of allusions to particular Elizabethan dance styles. That Britten consciously modelled them on 'real' dances is confirmed not only by the music itself, but also by Imogen Holst's recollections of her 'research trips', which involved learning the appropriate dance steps for each genre.[46] She recounted:

> [Britten] asked about the tumbler, and in the same breath talked about the Morris, so I leapt at it, and he showed me a photograph in Arbeau which mentioned [sic] a small boy dancing a Morris jig in aristocratic circles! So I showed him some steps and told him why they painted their faces black.[47]

The structures, speeds and time signatures of each dance accord with Elizabethan models: Pavan (A A' B B structure in a stately duple metre); Galliard (A A' B B' A" structure in triple metre with six minims per phrase); Lavolta (A B A B C A structure and an extremely lively six crotchets per bar); Morris Dance (A B C D structure with each section repeated and a skipping 4/4 time); March (binary form processional march in 4/2); and Coranto (A B A C structure overlapping with pit-orchestra in 6/4 with many hemiolas).[48] After each section the crowd responds to the dances by repeating verbal descriptions of what they have just heard, for example 'graceful gliding'[49] after the Pavan and 'Lusty leaping! Jump for joy!'[50] after the Lavolta; another example of over-determination. The rhythmic vitality is enhanced by the tabor and 'authenticity' is also suggested by the incorporation of the Lavolta – historically known to have been Elizabeth's favourite dance.

Furthermore, Britten actively researched the sound-world of such dance orchestras, desperately wanting a large quantity of trumpets (for his own 'trumpet theme') in his on-stage *banda*. In her diary Imogen Holst recorded:

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[46] 'When Britten was "quite mystified about speeds and lengths of dances", Miss Holst volunteered to go to Oxford the following day "to have lessons on the Pavane, Galliard, Coranto and La Volta." Three days later she returned and "went round directly after breakfast and made Peter do the La Volta straight away!"' Philip Reed, 'The Creative Evolution of *Gloriana*', *Britten's Gloriana*, p. 35.
[47] Benjamin Britten, *Gloriana*, p. 35.
[48] Peter Holman, *Dowland: Lachrimae* (1604), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999.
[49] Benjamin Britten, *Gloriana*, p. 127.
[50] *Ibid.*, p. 132.

> Ben rang up and said would I go round in the middle of the morning because he was struck with the problem of the dances in Gloriana. When I got there he began talking about the orchestra on the stage for the ballroom scene: what instruments would they have had; he'd decided to have violas for viols, so as to get away from the "sloppy brilliance" of the violins! He also talked about woodwind and suggests 2 flutes in unison, high up, with the slight out-of-tuneness adding to the > loudness. Then he talked about trumpets in Gloriana – he was enviously reading the lists of the numbers they'd had in 1600. I asked him how many he'd got on the stage and he said only three because he didn't think in all conscience he could ask for more, and I said of course he could, what else were the tax payers paying for, and he said "well perhaps I could", and I said yes, for the Gala night, and then be able to have fewer when necessary, and he said "yes, I think I'll have *twelve*"![51]

The requirements for the on-stage *banda* in this scene are: five strings/woodwinds (one soprano, two alto and two bass), pipe and tabor. In relation to staging, Basil Coleman notes: 'Britten asks for on stage orchestra to be far back. He wants the sound for the dancers to come unmistakably from two different directions (i.e., orchestra pit and stage orchestra).'[52] This spatial placement contributes to Britten's use of layering effects, as we shall see. It is also interesting to note that trumpets in 'multiples of three'[53] (as in *Aïda*) feature in the tournament scene of act I.

Once again, however, Britten challenges his models. This occurs strikingly during the Lavolta, where the pit orchestra vies with the on-stage *banda*, causing clashes and at times even parodying the form with its surprising and 'disruptive' timbres, including 'lewd' sliding trombones. Here, the orchestra is added gradually; first single phrases by clarinet, bass clarinet, second violin and viola are heard, then the full orchestra with prominent trombone glissandi. This colourful burgeoning of sound, with the pit-orchestra 'commenting' on the stage music, is replayed in miniature at the close, the condensation into a shorter time intensifying the effect [Fig. 5.8].

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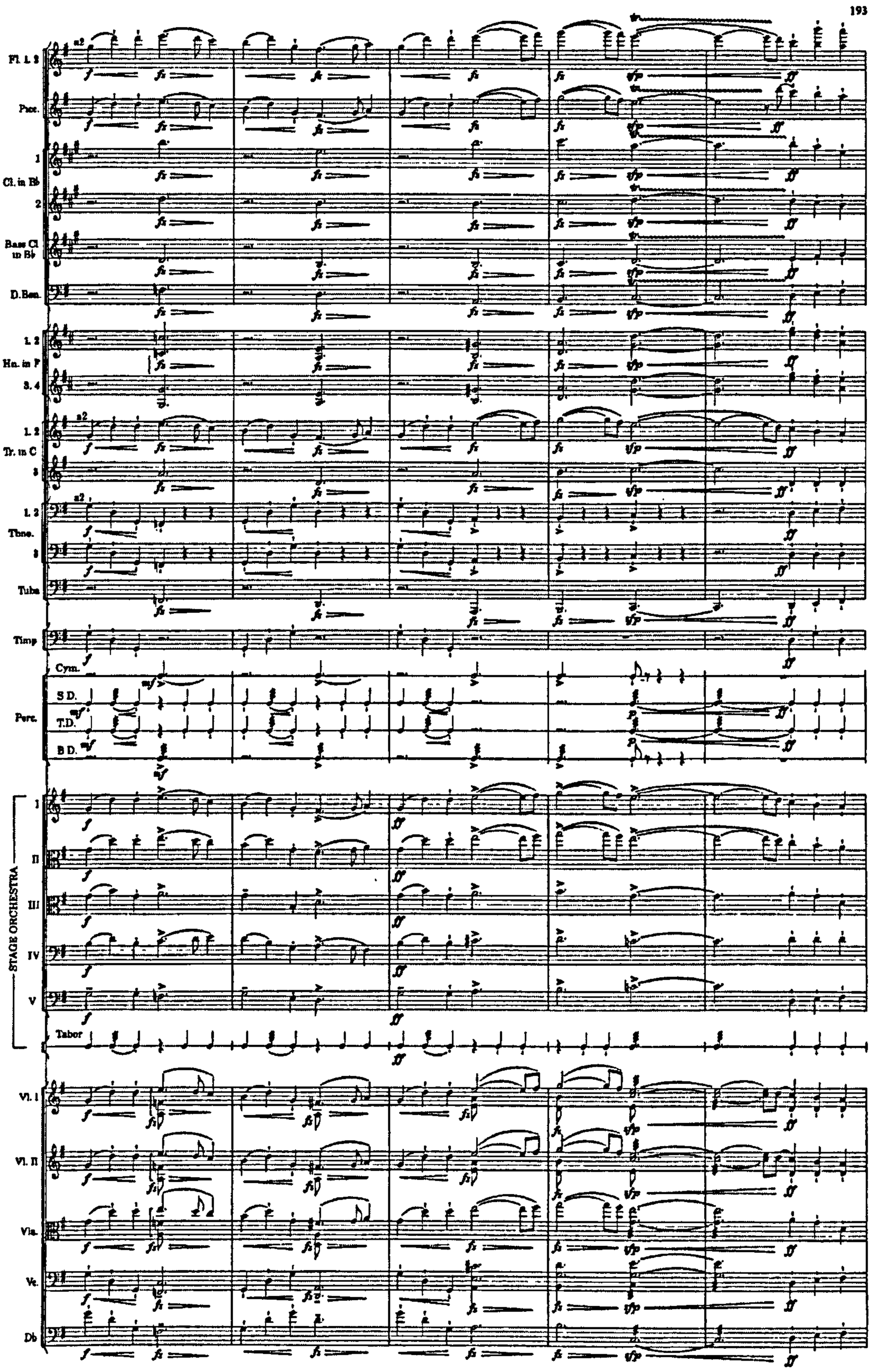
[51] *Ibid.*, p. 35.
[52] Basil Coleman, 'Problems and Solutions in the Production of "Gloriana"', *Tempo*, No. 28, 1953, p. 14.
[53] Benjamin Britten, *Gloriana*, p. 1.

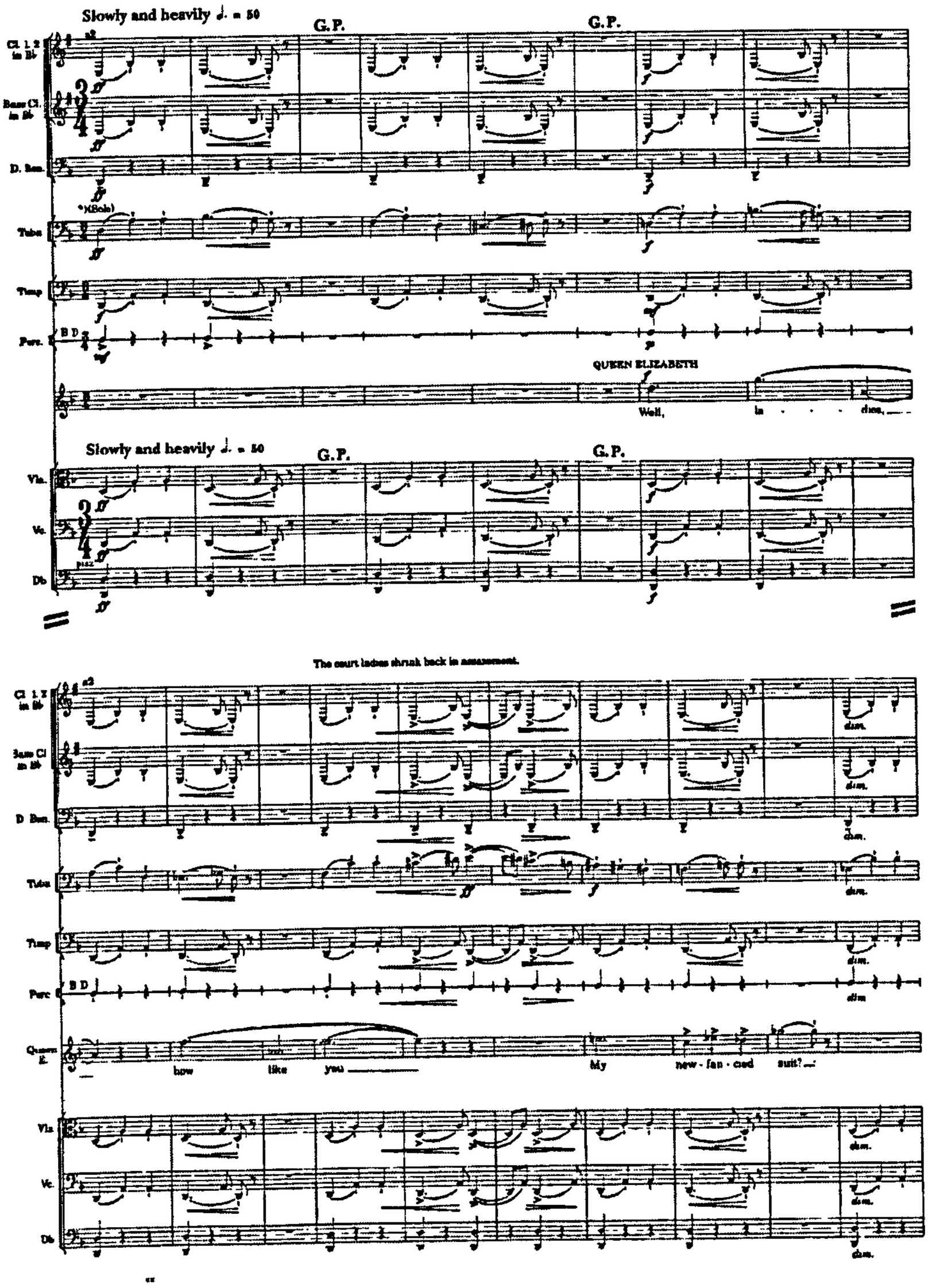
Fig. 5.8 Layering of the on-stage *banda* with pit-orchestra, *Gloriana*, act II scene iii, Lavolta, p. 192-3.



This move towards parody and distortion is even more marked in the Queen's Burlesque. Here, Britten alludes not to a dance form but to the satirical theatrical (and operatic) genre, contorting the Lavolta theme as Elizabeth enters the stage in a stolen and mis-fitting dress. Woodwind and tuba outline brash *ff* fragments of the theme punctuated by silence, and the scene abounds in semitonal clashes within the orchestra and against Elizabeth's vocal line [Fig. 5.9]. The accompaniment slips ever sharp-wards while she inflects her melody flat-wards. Her grotesque appearance is thus (mis-)matched by the orchestra. The *banda* is obviously lacking here, allowing Britten retrospectively to parody the music of his own work; a self-conscious 'rebellion' against the models themselves, perhaps. The dances are revealed, as Evans aptly puts it, as '*token[s]* of old music'[54] and not always taken seriously. This passage acts as a fissure in the musical surface that demonstrates Britten's self-conscious relationship with the 'past'.

[54] Peter Evans, *The Music of Benjamin Britten*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2002, p. 201.

Fig. 5.9 The Queen's Burlesque, *Gloriana*, act II scene iii, p. 199.



Moreover, at the very close of the dance scene the *banda* dances are layered once again with the orchestra, the veils of sound working against each other and giving the impression that the dances are literally swept away, even submerged by the orchestral voice once again taking control. This suggests not only the 'authorial' supremacy of the pit-orchestra at this point, but also the vulnerability of the Elizabethan dances throughout the preceding scene. It may even be read as an acknowledgement of the mythical nature of this invented past and the insubstantiality of the historical dream in a harsh post-war world.

In the masque scene (act II scene I No. 2) some unexpected Elizabethan associations occur. Again, the scene is built around a sequence of dances, introduced by the Spirit of the Masque [Fig. 5.10].

Fig. 5.10 Masque scene structure, act II scene i.

No. 2	p. 82	Chorus 'Melt earth to sea'	*Moving forward*
	83	Recitative Spirit 'And now we summon from this leafy bower'	
	84	**Dance: 'Time'** Semi-chorus 'Yes, he is time, lusty and blithe'	*Quick and gay*
	86	*Scena* Elizabeth, Essex 'And time it was that brought me here'	
	87	**Dance: 'Concord'** Semi-chorus 'Concord, concord is here'	*Slow*
	87	Recitative Spirit 'Now time with concord dances'	
	88	**Dance: 'Time and Concord'** Semi-chorus 'From springs of bounty'	*Gracefully swaying*
	89	*Scena* Raleigh, Mountjoy 'My lord, hath time brought concord now'	
	90	**Dance: 'Country Girls'** Semi-chorus 'Sweet flag, sweet flag'	*Fast*
	91	Recitative Spirit 'Behold a troop of rustic swains'	*As before*
	92	**Dance: 'Rustics and Fishermen'** Semi-chorus 'From fen and meadow'	*Very lively*
	93	Recitative Spirit 'Led by time and concord'	*Slow*

93	**Dance: 'Final Dance of Homage'** Semi-chorus 'These tokens of our love receiving'	*Smooth and gracious*

This patchwork of descriptive dances takes on a narrative element. Not only are there rustics and fishermen, but the concepts of time and concord are animated. These musical descriptions, rife with clichés – the dotted rustic rhythms of the country girls, the lively folk-like homophony of the fishermen – recall Verdi's invention of Orientalism, the evocation of a generalised colour and an idealised 'otherness'. This scene alludes to the 'green England' folk-fantasy even more strongly than the dance scene, which is somewhat surprising given Britten's violent rejection of the 'pastoral school'.[55] But, just as the priestesses songs point out a dramatic trajectory, so, too, do the masque songs. The metaphors of time and concord allow for the spectators to contemplate their situation at this point in the drama. Moreover, although it may be expected that the choral sections would allude to the madrigal genre, their tendency towards homophony rather than counterpoint suggests the English sacred choral tradition of Stanford, Gibbons and Batton. This is perhaps unsurprising if we take into consideration Britten's pronouncement that he wanted the opera 'to show off certain facets of English musical life, such as the remarkable ballet and choral singing.'[56] Thus the sounds of the choir, here in a secular context, are given centre stage. This eclectic representation of a tradition, however, leads back to the problem of pastiche. If he was to 'survey' Englishness, could the work truly sustain its dramatic imperative? The issues of cohesion and the pervasiveness of this *tinta* are explored below.

Italian opera, too, has frequently made reference to English music. Yet, the richness of the *tinta* does not match that of Britten's evocation. Verdi's only English opera *Falstaff* is set in Windsor (*Macbeth* and *Aroldo* are set in Scotland), but it displays little local colour. Donizetti, however, wrote a series of operas on English subjects, particularly focusing on the monarchy – *Anna Bolena*, *Elizabetta al castello di Kenilworth* – and his *Roberto Devereux* recounts the love and tragedy of Elizabeth

[55] Benjamin Britten, *Britten on Music*, pp. 33-35.
[56] Benjamin Britten, *Gloriana*, p. 55.

and Essex's relationship.[57] While the overture of Donizetti's work is based on the British national anthem, though, the remainder of the opera does not overtly allude to the musical heritage of its setting. What Britten does, then, in comparison with his Italian predecessors is to paint the locations of his opera with references to 'real' music. His quest is not for re-creation, but rather an exploration of past sound-worlds, an impulse and inquisitiveness that is arguably also a catalyst for his glances towards Verdi. Moreover, in actively looking to the past, his work resonates with the larger modernist project of Neo-Classicism, or the Neo-Baroque. For him *tinta* is also a facet of his aesthetic position: it is not just about surface 'painting' but has deeper structural and harmonic implications.

So far, it is evident that large-scale, often diegetic moments contribute significantly to the *tinta* of both *Aïda* and *Gloriana*. But the elusiveness of the term means that the factors that constitute colour across *whole operas* are far from clear. According to Gilles de Van 'the analogies that make up the *tinta* of an opera appeal to a memory that is indistinct, an emotional memory, one that associates different moments but without perceiving the reason for this association'.[58] And descriptions of *tinta* elements vary widely from Rosen's exploration of tempo and metre to Budden and de Van who identify specific melodic gestures and orchestral timbers. Francis Irving Travis also proposes that orchestral colour is an essential part of *tinta*.[59] A promising and multivalent approach is explored by de Van in his descriptions of *La traviata*, which acknowledge a myriad of contributing factors that establish an overall colour.[60] When he describes *Aïda*, however, he notes the scale of a rising 6th – symbolising heroism – as a major point of *tinta*. Counter to his previous conclusions, he uses what appears to be a 'recurring theme' to elucidate the colour of the entire work. Budden similarly observes a falling 5-1 gesture labelling it a component of *tinta*.[61]

Questions of 'unity' thus arise here: to what extent may a work display a single colour? If colour is split or layered, may composite colours be described as multiple

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[57] Michael G. Paulson, *The Queen's Encounter: The Mary Stuart Anachronism in Dramas by Diamante, Boursault, Schiller, and Donizetti*, New York, Peter Lang, 1987.
[58] Gilles de Van, *Verdi's Theatre: Creating Drama Through Music*, p. 331.
[59] Francis Irving Travis, *Verdi's Orchestration*, p. 26.
[60] Gilles de Van, *Verdi's Theatre: Creating Drama Through Music*, p. 336.
[61] Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi*, Vol. 3, p. 208.

tinte? And in what musical dimensions is *tinta* active? Along the lines that de Van proposed for *La traviata*, we may list the following as a complex of elements that make up *Aïda*'s distinctive colour. The integration of visual elements into the description offers the possibility of a richer consideration of the score's colour in performance:

- Brass, string and low flute sonorities
- Modal inflections
- 'Exotic' arabesques and vocal ornamentation
- Duple-time
- Triplets, *ostinati* and martial rhythms
- Colourful staging: temples, processions, dances

In Britten's score, too, the *tinta* is variable and 'unstable', a complex of differing colours. Yet, unlike *Aida*, the colourful allusions to the 'past' may be detected even in the sections not openly indebted to Elizabethan forms. A striking example of this occurs in Raleigh's song (act I scene i), as he describes the tension between Essex and Mountjoy. Each verse is an A B B' structure, with three verses arranged strophically. The A section is slow, while the B sections are quick and playful. Moreover, many rhythmic games play across the song, with alternating 3/4 and 4/4 bars and hemiola rhythms. The archaism of the style is exaggerated by the Lydian #4 in bar 2 (in B*b* major) and the *b*7 in bar 4. False relations and the division technique deepen the impression. As Evans also notes, the Queen's Prayer in act I scene ii includes plainsong references and fauxbourdon allusions.[62]

These references to the 'Elizabethan' *tinta* in *Gloriana* thus transcend the openly 'diegetic' spans of the work. Not only is the 'Elizabethanness' more pervasive than Verdi's rendering of the 'exotic', but it also shapes private utterance. Even further, the modalism of Britten's Elizabethan models permeates the score. The modal characteristics of his music – a trait of his extended-tonal language – are paradoxically strengthened by the opera's 'mock-archaism'.

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[62] Peter Evans, *The Music of Benjamin Britten*, p. 195.

4. *Gloriana* and Grand Opera

The dances, hymns and processions of *Aïda* are overt references to French Grand Opera, with its love of spectacle and the fantastic. Indeed, the exotic setting itself was part of the Parisian lust for the sensual 'other' in entertainment – symbolising liberation, the free reign of desire and the allure of the unknown. In the case of *Gloriana*, the 'other' is replaced by 'history', by nationalist feeling, a celebration of Englishness. Stage spectacle is by no means missing, however. As Britten stated 'I don't think we were wrong in doing this, because if you want to give a just picture of the Elizabethan age you need to show the rich ceremonial aspects of life at that time.'[63] And as we have seen, the dances and the masque are alive with pageantry. In addition, Elizabeth's processions, the song of the ballad singer (act III) and the tournament (act I) all celebrate the visual. As John W. Klein notes, however, there is often a tension in the genre between the purely sensuous pleasure of aural and visual stimulation for its own sake and the dramatic imperative: 'A spectacular opera possesses one grave disadvantage: it is necessarily hampered by a good deal of purely decorative music. Even *Aïda* is no exception to this rule'.[64] This statement judges Grand Opera in negative terms, but it does point towards a tension inherent to the genre.

Britten's allusion to Grand Opera is reinforced by the use of refrain structures, in particular the recurring interventions of the chorus: 'Green leaves are we, red rose our golden queen'.[65] Such *ritornelli* or 'refrain structures' occur frequently in Verdian opera, ranging from the simple act II chorus of the gipsies (with internal *scena*) in *La traviata*, and the complex choral refrain in Desdemona's 'flower song' in act II of *Otello*,[66] to the 'hymn' in the central finale of *Don Carlos*, another Grand Opera. The weighting of the acts also involves large-scale finale structures, a prominent feature of *Aïda*. Especially significant in this context is the act II finale from *Aïda*. The victory 'hymn' of the Egyptians recurs four times during the scene, and the choruses develop towards a final euphoric repetition. Britten, however, spreads this idea through the

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[63] Benjamin Britten, *Britten on Music*, p. 296.
[64] John W. Klein, 'Some Reflections on Gloriana', *Tempo*, No. 29, 1953, p. 16.
[65] Benjamin Britten, *Gloriana*, p. 43.
[66] Scott L. Balthazar, 'The Forms of Set Pieces', *The Cambridge Companion to Verdi*, 2004.

entire work, as the 'Green leaves are we' theme returns at the close of the opera, poignantly highlighting the Queen's heart-break at the betrayal and death of Essex.

Moreover, during the composition of the work Britten requested postcards of Queen Elizabeth from the National Portrait Gallery, an indication that the visual element of the performance was in his mind early in the creative process. He fully embraced the idea of stage opulence, too, as the descriptions of the director Basil Coleman reinforce. In act I scene i Coleman describes an arena surrounded by a 'circle of gaily coloured tents between which Cuffe can dodge as if following the tournament … These make possible the display of the court in the scene.'[67] In act I scene ii, Coleman demonstrates his reliance on historical evidence: 'The few prints extant of Nonesuch Place show an extravagant and fantastic timber and plaster castle. We tried to achieve this fantastic quality.'[68] Furthermore, in act II scene iii, he notes:

> Scenery requires as large space as possible for the dancers in Elizabethan costumes. Important that Elizabeth should be raised for all entrances … Orchestra is raised high upon a minstrels' gallery which is set to one side of the stage as if it was centre of the much larger room extending offstage … Lady Essex's dress should remain rich and good looking in spite of being "gaudy". Suggest that a dress of ten years ahead (James I) might achieve effect and provide shortness referred to in the libretto.[69]

This resonates powerfully with the tussle between 'authenticity' and invention in Verdi's discussions with Mariette, an expert in Egyptian history. Britten's opera is alive with generic allusions to Grand Opera, creating powerful tensions with the personal intensity of the tragedy.

5. *Gloriana* and national identity

The Verdian and Grand Opera allusions of *Gloriana* are closely bound up with notions of its national identity. As Kildea observes, the Coronation opera resonated with the nationalistic aims of the Arts Council, which continued to hold post-war

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[67] Basil Coleman, 'Problems and Solutions in the Production of "Gloriana"', p. 14.
[68] *Ibid.*, p. 14.
[69] *Ibid.*, p. 15.

aspirations of creating English 'Grand Opera'.[70] Continental operas, such as *Aïda*, were associated with 'grandeur' and the aim was to convince the public that English composers could do the same.[71] Accordingly, prior to the premiere, *Gloriana* was hailed by critics as a quintessential exponent of English art. Britten's appropriation of Verdian *tinta* techniques through the introduction of dances, masques and choruses, albeit with some telling challenges, underlines this aspiration.

Yet, *Gloriana* was far from a success at its first performance. Indeed, precisely because of the pomp and ceremony of the opening night, with an audience very hard to please, the opera was condemned. In an exact reversal of the fate of *Aïda*, *Gloriana*'s status as a nationalist work was increasingly downplayed. Paradoxically, the work was slated in the press for the very elements that were praised beforehand: the dances and masque scenes of 'Grand Opera'. Moreover, the narrative, which emphasised the mental and physical deterioration of the Monarch, made stronger by the grotesque burlesque of her dances, appeared to cut too close to the bone.[72] Thus, the work was deemed neither modern nor idealistic enough for its audience.

The correspondences between *Aïda* and *Gloriana* then, are not direct. Just as the nationalist impulse that began the composition of *Gloriana* is complex and even paradoxical, so too is the way in which the works evoke their fictional worlds and their own identity. Verdi invents a Westernised East and Britten invents an idealised history of English music while alluding to Italian *tinta* techniques. In *Gloriana*, tendencies towards naïve pastiche co-exist with critical engagement with Elizabethan music and references to nineteenth-century operatic tradition. (This exploration of national characteristics through allusion to the musical 'other' is developed further in chapter nine in relation to *Death in Venice*.) A rich, almost endless, series of echoes stretches back from Britten's work, invoking a vast array of resonances, references, quotations and musical memories.

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[70] Paul Kildea, *Selling Britten: Music and the Market Place*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 118.
[71] *Ibid.*, p. 119.
[72] Antonia Malloy, 'Britten's Major Set-Back? Aspects of the First Critical Response to Gloriana', *Britten's Gloriana*, pp. 49-65; Heather Wiebe, '"Now and England": Britten's *Gloriana* and the "New Elizabethans"', pp. 141-172.

Moreover, Britten's oscillations between reverence and parody of his English models reveal the fragility of 'national identity' within the work itself, suggesting a pessimistic disenchantment with the ideals of the past. There is a crucial ambivalence, as Britten equally celebrates and subverts musical symbols of 'Englishness', as well as transforming Verdian *tinta*, leaving a question-mark over the possibility of an uncomplicated conception of national identity at this point in the twentieth century.

Chapter VI

Spectres of Other Musics:
Staging the Supernatural in *The Turn of the Screw*

'Peter Quint, you Devil!'[1] the tortured, dying cry of young Miles, marks the climax of the final scene of *The Turn of the Screw*. In an emotional triangulation with Quint, the ghostly valet, and the Governess, his teacher, Miles is the object of an attempted double 'seduction': Quint offers the pleasures of the imagination and sexual liberation laced with homoeroticism;[2] the Governess offers protection from otherworldly forces, maternal security and moral purity.[3] The fulfilment of choice (perhaps a necessarily impossible one) is thwarted through Miles' collapse and the musical denouement of his violent death cry. The Governess and Quint then come together in a duet: Quint bids Miles goodbye, believing that they (himself and his ghostly accomplice Miss Jessel) have failed, the Governess believing (wrongly) that he is saved. Here, their verbal opposition is tamed to *musical* consonance, suggesting that they are one split voice, that Quint is the flip-side of the Governess' own character, her double.[4] The return of the haunting 'Malo' theme, first sung by Miles and associated with Quint's teachings, marks a poignant dissolution, a release of tension to end the scene. There is a disconcerting open-endedness, however, as the Governess' vocal appropriation of Quint's song suggests that he is still very much part of her thoughts; a final heart-wrenching sign of the uncertain and conflicting motivations and allegiances that inhabit the work.

The closing scene is a condensation of many of the pressing issues, both dramatic and musical, that criss-cross the wider opera. Firstly, the scene underlines the work's

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[1] Benjamin Britten, *The Turn of the Screw*, London, Boosey & Hawkes, 1955, p. 194.
[2] Clifford Hindley, 'Why Does Miles Die? A Study of Britten's *The Turn of the Screw*', *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 74, No. 1, 1990, p. 5.
[3] Michelle Deutsch, 'Ceremonies of Innocence: Men, Boys and Women in *The Turn of the Screw*', *Henry James on Stage and Film*, ed. John R. Bradley, New York, Palgrave, 2000, p. 82.
[4] Philip Rupprecht, *Britten's Musical Language*, p. 177.

ambiguous message about teaching, morality and sexual development, which is explored through the clash between Quint's liberal and homoerotic ideals and the Governess' conservative and heterosexual ones. Secondly, it highlights the conflict between the spectral identity of Quint and his very tangible visual and singing stage presence, which in turn leads to generic questions about the work as musical 'horror' or 'tragic melodrama'. Thirdly, the emotional and musical intensification, which climaxes with Miles' cry and dissolves with the Governess' 'Malo theme', is just one example of Britten's sophisticated tension-building, owing much to Verdian processes. Fourthly, the 'Malo' theme is an example of 'appropriated' music. Indeed, shadows of previously heard music frequently emerge in the score, originating from inside the opera – in the manner of Verdian 'recurring themes' and Wagnerian *leitmotivs* – and outside it – in the manner of extra-textual allusions, ranging from Stravinsky to Mozart. These contribute to the eclecticism of the score and also its uncanny chill.

The Italian critics present at the 1954 premiere at La Fenice, Venice, not only drew parallels between Verdi's approach to opera and Britten's new work, but grappled with many of the themes outlined above. Their observations thus enrich the discussion, particularly as they give insight into the opera's Italian reception in relation to their own, necessarily subjective but nonetheless thought provoking, perception of the Italian musical tradition.

This chapter explores four issues: (1) the ambiguous sexual and moral stance of the opera and Britten's staging of the supernatural; (2) the work's allusions to Verdian vocal arches and intensification processes; (3) Britten's meaningful 'distortion' of these intensification patterns; and (4) the opera's allusions to Verdian recurring themes and Wagnerian *leitmotivs*, and Britten's 'appropriation' of the musical utterance of Perotin, Mozart, Stravinsky, and Balinese Gamelan – the spectres of other musics.

1. Morality, melodrama and the ghosts made 'real'

Writing for *Avanti* on the day after the premiere, Luigi Pestalozza pounced upon the opera's controversial moral position:

[Britten] a riportare nei giusti rapporti originari la sottile angoscia di James, a ridare al Giro di vite la nobilità dello stile e il distacco da ogni facile compiacenza per la scabrosità del soggetto, ha pensato Britten, mai apparsoci così contenuto e «casto», così nobilmente partecipe eppore scrupolosamente vigilato, come in questa sua nuova opera in cui affronta, e per la prima volta apertamente, il tema preferito, e fors'anche ossessionante, dell'inversione sessuale, delle inibizioni o perversioni erotiche.

Dopo il Peter Grimes *e il* Billy Budd *dove i rispettivi protagonisti lasciano trapelare una loro natura anormale,* Giro di vite, *presentata in prima mondiale alla Fenice, affronta infatti un problema scottante: il disordine dell'adolescenza di fronte ai richiami dei sensi, la sua possibile «caduta» nel vischio di una seduzione anormale.*[5]

This review, laced with Christian imagery (the 'fall' and Britten's 'chaste' nature), and prejudices about homosexuality ('sexual inversion'), suggests that the 'moral' of the tale is clear: by dying Miles is saved from the 'sin' resulting from the corrupting influence of Quint and his own precocious and homoerotic sexuality. The subject of the loss of innocence is a recurring one in Britten's oeuvre, and is centralised here. Yet here, as in many of his other works (most notably *Death in Venice*), it is challenged by a contrary impulse towards the celebration of youthful freedom and the homoerotic. Thus, Pestalozza's review provides only one side of the story. He chooses to see the work as a disavowal and outright critique of the very homoeroticism and sexual liberation that Britten appears to embrace. As Hindley has persuasively argued, far from being drawn as a *threatening* agent of 'abnormal seduction', Quint, with his high celesta sonorities and undulating siren melismas is presented as an alluring symbol of sexual freedom.[6] And in Piper's text his boundless explorations of the *imagination* are often emphasised rather than any suggestion of his

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[5] '[Britten] has managed to reinstate the right original relationships of the subtle anguish of [Henry] James and to bring *The Turn of the Screw* back to that nobility of style and detachment from any easy complacency for the thorny subject: Britten has never appeared to us as so restrained and 'chaste', so nobly participating and yet scrupulously vigilant, as in this new opera in which he faces for the first time openly, [his] favourite theme, and maybe even obsessive [theme], of sexual inversion, of erotic inhibitions and perversions. After *Peter Grimes* and *Billy Budd*, where the protagonists let their abnormal nature be revealed, *The Turn of the Screw*, world premiered at La Fenice, faces a burning problem: the disorder of adolescence in front of the sensual urges, its possible "fall" into the mire of an abnormal seduction.' My translation. Luigi Pestalozza, 'Britten Insegna con "Giro di Vite" che il Teatro Musicale non è Morto', *Avanti*, Milan, 15 September, 1954. The first reviews of James' tale also focused on its morality: 'The work is not horrible in any grotesque or 'realistic' sense. The strongest and most affecting argument against sin we have lately encountered in literature (without forcing any didactic purpose upon the reader) it is nevertheless free from the slightest hint of grossness.' *New York Times*, October 15 1898, pp. 681-682.

[6] Clifford Hindley, 'Why Does Miles Die? A Study of Britten's *The Turn of the Screw*'.

'perversion'.[7] That is not to say, however, that there is no ambiguity: Miss Jessel, his ghostly accomplice, is repeatedly described as 'evil', and their coupling suggests that Quint's influence, too, may bring pain rather than pleasure. Furthermore, the review aptly illustrates the wider Italian press response to the opera, which was characterised by disconcerted but passionate engagement with the opera's 'moral' implications.[8] Given Britten's own suppressed paedophilia and well documented 'infatuation' with David Hemmings – the young singer who sang Miles in Venice – it is perhaps not surprising that the British press at premiere chose not to address this 'thorny' subject.[9]

By testing the blurred lines surrounding acceptable behaviour, emergent sexuality, and morality, Britten confronts an anxiety at the heart of James' story. Indeed, the concept of 'sin' for children in the nineteenth century frequently ran counter to natural sexual maturation,[10] and it goes without saying that homoeroticism was, at this time, placed firmly in the category of 'sin'. And it was a tension that was socially pressing. Yet, this culturally reinforced, stern 'moral' stance generated a wealth of veiled literary rebellions and celebrations of the homoerotic by James and many others. *The Turn of the Screw* thus engages with deep social fears. Moreover, it does so through the medium of the horror genre, providing just one example of the ability of supernatural fiction to address troubling aspects of 'real life', providing a 'coded' critique of societal norms. If Quint inhabited James' fictional world 'alive' perhaps similar issues would have had to remain closeted.

Given the fantastical nature of James' story, our first thought in the quest for operatic parallels may be Franco-Italian Grand Opera. Works such as Meyerbeer's *Robert le Diable* and Rossini's *Semiramide* include spectres as part of their stage spectacle, the theatricality of their presence according with the grand ceremonies, swirling dance scenes and sumptuous settings of their staging. Indeed, these are but two examples of the wider nineteenth-century operatic preoccupation with the possibility of a hidden 'other' world, explored through the representation of

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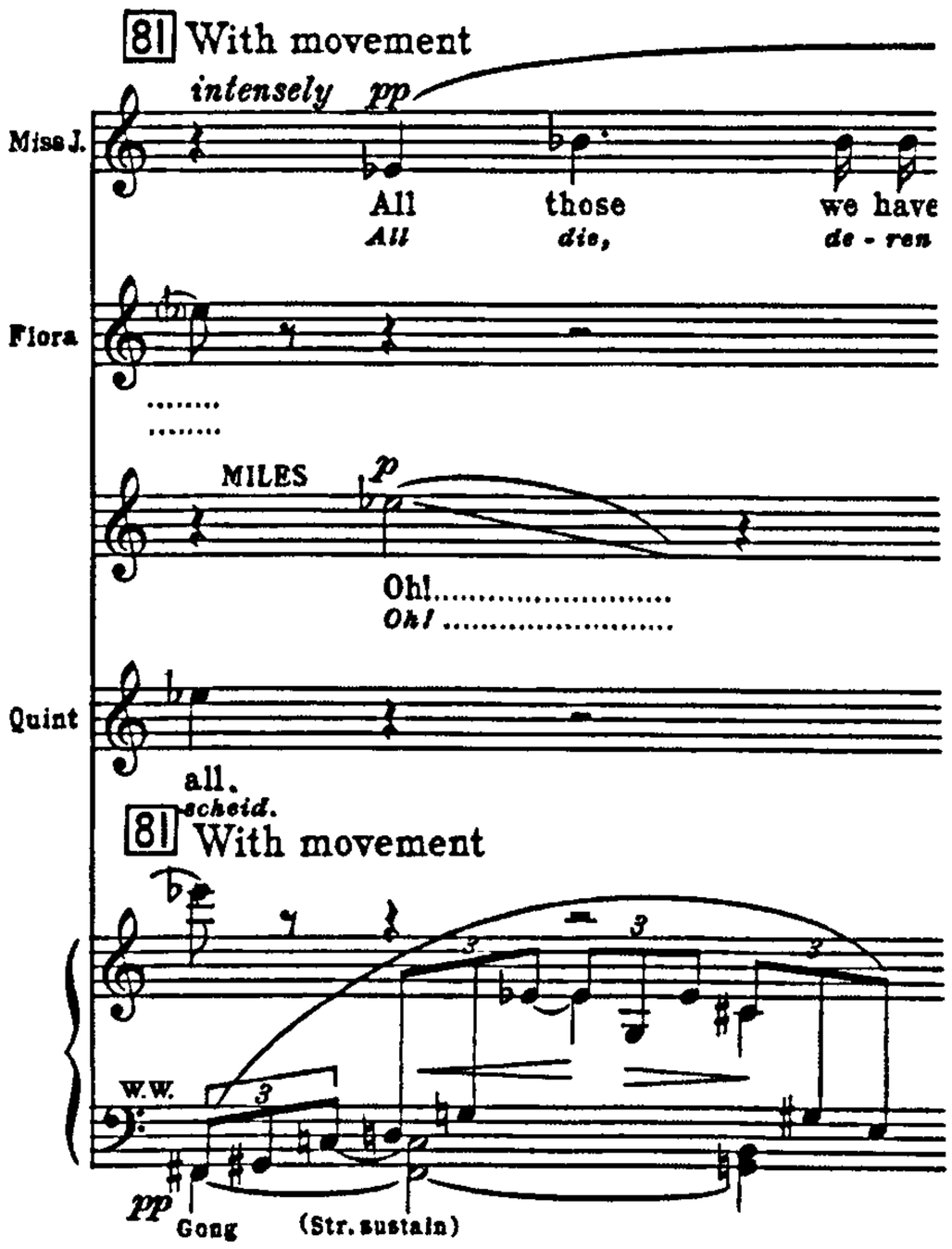
[7] This comes to the fore in Quint's appeals to Miles in act I scene 8. Benjamin Britten, *The Turn of the Screw*, p. 83.
[8] Colin Mason, *The Guardian*, 15 September, 1954, p. 5.
[9] John Bridcut, *Britten's Children*, pp. 194-210.
[10] Eric Haralson, *Henry James and Queer Modernity*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003.

sleepwalking, dreaming, entranced vision and madness.[11] Yet, in Britten's work the entrances of the ghosts are more discreet than theatrically flamboyant. They don't appear with thunder, speak the incantations of the Gods, or place curses on the living while rising from tombs, as in act I scene iii of *Semiramide*. The theatrical is not missing in Britten's work altogether, however. The wailing, falling inflections of the ghosts' utterance and Miles' reactions provide a clichéd, even 'childlike', representation of the spectres; a flamboyant yet chilling gesture suggesting that we hear them in the context of Flora's and Miles' imaginations [Fig. 6.1].

Fig. 6.1 Miles' Ghostly Wail, *The Turn of the Screw*, act I scene viii, p. 90.



A far closer example of staging the supernatural may be found in the works of Verdi. Aptly, writing for *Corriere Degli Sera* on 15 September 1954, Franco Abbiati noted:

> *E' un sogno di Britten – il fondatore e animatore dell'English Opera Group che stasera ha presentato Il giro di vite in una edizione sotto tutti gli aspetti encomiabile – quello di*

[11] Gary Tomlinson, *Metaphysical Song: An Essay on* Opera, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1999, p. 93.

> *rinnovare il melodrama così nelle architetture che vorrebbero seguire I modelli dell'ultimo periodo verdiano come per intenderci nelle opera murarie... Sogno audace, anzi temerario, comunque difficilmente realizzabile, pensiamo, coi «giri di vite». Esso ci trova tuttavia concordi perchè il melodrama è stato ed è la più originale creazione del genio italiano. Bisogna almeno volergli bene.*[12]

This review is notable for a number of reasons: the coupling of Verdian late style with Britten's work, the generic labelling of it as 'melodrama', the assertion of an ambition towards 'Italian genius' in its form and for the declaration that if it aspires to the melodramatic, even if failingly, then it should be loved. Although the review is a little vague – what does Abbiati mean by the 'architectures' of melodrama? – it does highlight his perception of Britten's engagement with the Italian tradition, Verdi in particular. It also underlines the extent to which Verdi was (and, arguably, still is) hailed as an icon of Italian musical 'genius', making the parallel even more culturally striking.

The Verdi connection leads us to his enthusiasm for *genere fantastico*, which clearly emerges in *Macbeth*. There is another connection, too. The last time that Britten had seen Pears on stage as a ghost prior to his appearance as Quint was his role as Banquo's ghost in the Sadler's Wells production of *Macbeth* in 1943. Verdi's idea of the fantastic involved stage spectacle – he planned a magic lantern scene for the procession of the dead kings in the act III divination in the witches' cave – as well as musical evocation of the supernatural, including traditional devices such as tremolando, chromaticism, *sf* shock chords, and vocal incantation.[13] This was part of his, and in turn the wider nineteenth century's, enthusiasm for *a sopresa* or effects.[14] Yet, he frequently emphasised the *human reactions* to apparitions above the appearance of the spectres themselves, playing with the close alliance between otherworldly 'visions' and the delusions of madness.

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[12] It is a dream of Britten – the founder and leader of the English Opera Group that presented *The Turn of the Screw* tonight in a version commendable in every aspect – to renew melodrama ... in its architectures that aim to follow the models of the last Verdian period ... An audacious dream, even reckless, however hardly achievable, we think, with 'turns of the screw'. This attempt however finds us in agreement because melodrama has been and is the most original creation of the Italian genius. The least we can do is to love it. My translation. Franco Abbiati, '"Il Giro di Vite" di Britten', *Corriere della Sera*, Milan, 15 September 1954.

[13] Terry Castle, 'Phantasmagoria: Spectral Technology and the Metaphysics of Modern Reverie', *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 15, No. 1, 1988, p. 33-34.

[14] *Verdi's Macbeth: A Sourcebook.*

In the act II finale of *Macbeth*, the sparkling, lively *brindisi* of Lady Macbeth is juxtaposed by the dark, sinister reactions of Macbeth to the ghost of Banquo. Between the verses of Lady Macbeth's song, which becomes a recurring refrain in the scene crafted for the pleasure of an array of dignitaries, the audience experiences the presence of the ghost through the silent representation of the spectre on stage and Macbeth's tortured reactions. This is a very public show of vulnerability, made more poignant by his newly elevated social position. (The structure of the scene and its key scheme are as follows: *parlante* (F) – *brindisi* (B*b*) – *parlante* (B*b*) – opening *parlante* (F) – first apparition (f) – reprise of *brindisi* (B*b*) – second apparition (b*b*-E) – *concertato* (E).) Macbeth's first vision of the ghost is suggested by chromatic inflections and sudden semi-quaver movement in the orchestra.[15] Yet, it is in his sung *response* to the vision – not shared by the other characters on stage – that his fear is conveyed: his gory descriptions of the monster and his fearful incantations with much note repetition suggest at once fear and solemn reverence. Moreover, Verdi's orchestra adopts the rhetoric of fear, abounding in *tremolando* chords and frequent *sf* > *f* indications. The orchestra thus appears to underline Macbeth's psychological turmoil rather than describing the appearance of the apparition itself. Similarly, while the witches sing with 'parlour' liveliness in their cave, they are *heard* as eerie by Macbeth – fear is clearly in the sight and ear of the beholder.[16]

As the courtiers do not share the ghostly vision, they believe that Macbeth is showing signs of madness. Verdi thus creates an ambiguity between Macbeth's own sight and the possibility of his mental instability, a confusion of outer and inner perception. This is compounded as Macbeth tries to convince the gathering of his 'visions' – *'là, là … là! nol ravvisi?!'* ('there, there … there! Can you see it there?!')[17] His fractured utterance simultaneously suggests his mounting terror and the possibility of insanity, as an insistent pedal-point leads to a *b*7 climax.[18] Chromatic movement describes Macbeth's spiralling fears,[19] and in the closing *concertato* the courtiers comment on Macbeth's appearance: *'Biechi arcani! sgomentato da*

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[15] Giuseppe Verdi, *Macbeth*, p. 149.
[16] Daniel Albright, 'The Witches and the Witch: Verdi's Macbeth', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, Vol. 17, No. 3, 2005, p. 2354.
[17] Giuseppe Verdi, *Macbeth*, p. 152.
[18] *Ibid.*, p. 153.
[19] *Ibid.*, p. 161.

fantasmi' ('fear and terror mark his features').[20] Another layering has thus occurred: the courtiers describe the perceptions of Macbeth, who reveals the presence of the Banquo's ghost through his own perceptions. This layering of reactions complicates rhetorical 'meaning', as the symbols of 'otherworldliness', terror, and madness coincide. Moreover, the silent ghost resonates with Macbeth's fear and guilt in relation to the murder he recently arranged. In a confusion of cause and effect, it is unclear whether his sightings are an externalisation of interior torments or the catalyst for tortured remorse. Verdi thus centralises the fallibility of human nature, and the supernatural is understood *through* subjective perception and interpretation, leaving the door to madness open.

In *The Screw*, Britten famously told Lord Harewood that he wanted the ghosts to be 'real':

> Ben and I argued about the haunting; had it to be explicit, or could it be the product of the Governess's paranoia – *she* was convinced that something was wrong, but was it really? I insisted on ambivalence, he on the need for the composer to make a decision – and he *had* taken one: that the haunting was real.[21]

Between perceiving the ghosts as 'real' threats, or inventions of the Governess' imagination (or both) Britten squarely chose the former. This decision has pivotal implications for his representation of the supernatural. According to Tzvetan Todorov's descriptions, supernatural fiction allows the reader to be suspended between the interpretation of events as uncanny and marvellous. In other words, events may be understood to have a worldly or other-worldly explanation.[22] By making the ghosts tangible, Britten makes this decision for the audience, placing the opera firmly in the realm of the marvellous. Moreover, in the transformation of the play into libretto the chapters of James' tale dealing with the more 'substantial' appearances of the ghosts are emphasised. Three points of particular interest arise when the chapters of the novella are aligned with the operatic structure [Fig. 6.2]: (1) The chapters omitted from Britten's version all concern the puzzled, disturbed

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[20] *Ibid.*, p. 175.
[21] Lord Harewood, *The Tongs and the Bones*, p. 139.
[22] Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic*, Cleveland, Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1973, quoted in: Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw*, Norton Critical Edition, ed. Deborah Esch and Jonathan Warren, London, Norton, 1999, p. 193.

musings of the Governess, which highlight the ambiguities and fallibility of her perceptions; (2) Britten replaces the Governess' *suppositions* about the aims of the ghosts to posses the children with a clear statement of their intentions performed by the ghosts themselves (act II scene i); (3) Britten omits the Governess' sightings of the ghosts on the stairs of the house, after she has seen Quint at the window (chapters 7-9). Britten and Piper thus (naturally) selected the moments of 'action' in the story, resulting in a down-playing of the ambiguities of the earlier stages and reducing the possibility of a psychological or uncanny interpretation. This pacing has the effect of both tightening the structure and reducing the conditionality of the Governess' narration.

Fig. 6.2 Structure of Britten's opera in relation to James' tale.

Act I	Prologue
Prologue: Setting the scene Narrator introduces the background to the Governess's tale	Framing narrative about the discovery of the Governess' manuscript at a supernatural story-telling gathering on Christmas Eve
Theme	
Scene I: The Journey The Governess' travels to Bly	Chapter 1
Variation I	
Scene II: The Welcome Mrs Grose, Flora and Miles greet the Governess	Chapter 1
Variation II	
Scene III: The Letter The Governess reads a letter from Miles' school	Chapter 2
Variation III	
Scene IV: The Tower The Governess sights Quint on the tower	Chapter 3
Variation IV	

Scene V: The Window The Governess sees Quint through the window	Chapter 4
Variation V	
Scene VI: The lesson Miles and Flora have a Latin Lesson	**No exact precedent**
Variation VI	
Scene VII: The lake Flora and the Governess play by the lake and sight Miss Jessel	Chapter 6
Variation VII	
Scene VIII: At Night Miles leaves his bedroom at night	Chapter 10-11
Act II	
Variation VIII	
Scene I: Colloquy and Soliloquy The ghosts discuss their plans to posses the children	**No exact precedent**
Variation IX	
Scene II: The Bells Flora, Miles, Mrs Grose and the Governess go to church and the children sing ghostly songs	Chapter 14
Variation X	
Scene III: Miss Jessel The Governess sees Miss Jessel in her classroom	Chapter 15

Variation XI

Scene IV: The Bedroom — Chapter 17
The Governess talks to Miles about his school,
and Quint calls to him

Variation XII

Scene V: Quint — Chapter 17
Miles steals the Governess' letter to the Master.

Variation XIII

Scene VI: The Piano — Chapters 18-20
Miles plays for the Governess, Flora plays with
Mrs Grose and Flora escapes to the garden

Variation XIV

Scene VII: Flora — Chapter 21
Flora is taken away from the house

Variation XV

Scene VIII: Miles — Chapter 23-4
Tussle between the Governess and Quint, and
Miles' death

Britten's treatment of the ghosts marks a trajectory from a blurring of the boundaries between the supernatural and madness, similar to that described in Verdi's *Macbeth*, to a far more radical one. The first three appearances of Quint and Miss Jessel are silent. Just as in the banquet scene, we perceive fear through identification with the Governess' perceptions and anxieties. The first appearance of Quint in the tower occurs in act I scene iv. The Governess walks in the grounds of the house to muse over her accomplishments, wishing that the master could see her progress with the children. Yet suddenly, her D major 'pastoral' *arioso* is broken by the intrusion of Quint's image on the tower. His presence swings the key flat-wards to A*b* and the celesta picks out slowly moving chords in the wake of the flurries of woodwind

gestures suggesting 'nature' in the preceding section. Britten's representation of Quint is more musically emphasised than Verdi's painting of Banquo, but it is again through human reaction that fear is communicated. The Governess is gripped by terror and her fragmented utterance becomes *p* with unstable accents and *crescendi* leading nowhere. At first she believes that she sees the master, but as Quint looks at her she realises her mistake. And it is this sighting, this visual recognition, which acts as the catalyst for her subsequent 'quick and agitated' *arioso* in F major. The accompaniment becomes fractured and her utterance angular and tense: 'Who? Who can it be?'[23] Moreover, signifiers of fear and madness coincide. Just as in Verdi's banquet scene, even late in act II Mrs Grose fails to see Miss Jessel by the lake when the Governess clearly sights her. Emphasis on the Governess' *reactions* and the fact that no-one else, until Miles with his final cry, acknowledges the presence of the ghost leaves a certain ambiguity about the Governess' mental state.

In act I scene v Quint appears at the window. He is once again marked by celesta, and the figuration of the Governess' frenzied *arioso* accompaniment from scene iii is tellingly repeated. It is only after this, however, that Mrs Grose reveals that Quint is dead. Paradoxically then, the Governess' previous fear was based on a belief in the tangible presence of Quint, which is redoubled in retrospect when she realises that he was an apparition.

Furthermore, in act I scene vii Miss Jessel is sighted across the lake. This time the Governess is aware of her ghostly status, and her sinister presence is heralded by dark sonorities and clashing dyads. The 'reaction' figuration from scene iii then returns. The audience are invited to feel fear through identification with the 'victim' of this haunting. Indeed, it is a feature of the horror genre that the audience are drawn into an emotional empathy with the character that experiences apparitions.[24]

However, the ghosts begin to sing. And in this act of sonic realisation they become individuals in a way that Verdi's ghosts never do. They gain agency, intention, history and even emotion. Britten thus, as in many of his operatic

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[23] Benjamin Britten, *The Turn of the Screw*, p. 38.
[24] Noel Carroll, 'The Nature of Horror', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 46, No. 1, 1987, pp. 51-59.

treatments, engages in a process of 'humanization', in this case even of those beyond the grave. As a result the traditional revulsion and fear prompted in response to 'horrors' becomes far more complicated. We are invited to identify with the spectres, which renders the opera a cross between horror and tragedy: the otherworldly as well as the worldly participate in a tragedy of love.[25] Two striking examples of this 'humanization' are the tortured conversation between Quint and Miss Jessel (act II scene i) and Miss Jessel's schoolroom lament (act II scene iii).

In the first, Miss Jessel and Quint participate in an emotionally anguished interaction.[26] Miss Jessel believes that Quint has beckoned her and expresses her passion through a vocal sigh moving lament-like from E*b* to D*b*, yet he denies his teasing: 'You heard the terrible sound of the wild swan's wings'.[27] Indeed, Quint's biting 'call? Not I!' with its bounding 5th leaps cuts across Miss Jessel's emotional outpouring, cruel in its lack of empathy. The exchange is repeated and varied three times before Quint reveals that he seeks 'a friend'. Mistakenly, Miss Jessel believes that it is her that he seeks, but her false assumption is greeted by Quint's malicious laughter 'No! Self deceiver,'[28] a dismissal rendered even more heart-wrenching as he breaks from song into heightened speech. The scene gradually reveals Quint's desire for a 'playmate'[29] and the ghosts' wish to 'possess' the children. Central though, in both libretto and musical rendering, is the very 'human' emotional life of the ghosts in this story of betrayal. Indeed, this quintessential Victorian tragedy – Miss Jessel's unrequited love for Quint – is latent in the James original.

Act II scene iii underlines the point. Here, the Governess discovers Miss Jessel haunting her schoolroom. The previous governess expresses her will for revenge and desire for acknowledgement of her 'tragedy'.[30] The lament resonates with a multiplicity of operatic heroines caught in the anguish of betrayal.[31] When the

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[25] Tony Magistrale, *Abject Terrors: Surveying the Modern and Postmodern Horror Film*, New York, Peter Lang, 2005, p. 4.
[26] Benjamin Britten, *The Turn of the Screw*, p. 106.
[27] *Ibid.*, p. 106.
[28] *Ibid.*, p. 107.
[29] *Ibid.*, p. 108.
[30] *Ibid.*, p. 134.
[31] Ned Lukacher, '"Hanging Fire": The Primal Scene of The Turn of the Screw', *Henry James's Daisy Miller, The Turn of the Screw, and Other Tales*, ed. Harold Bloom, New York, Chelsea House Publishers, 1987, p. 128.

Governess replies, however, it is apparent that she does not hear Miss Jessel's words. The 'duet' is antithetical. Miss Jessel may be real and singing to the audience, but the Governess never hears her directly, she only sees her. This is true of all of her ghost sightings, and even when she sings the 'Malo' theme (originating from Quint) she hears it from Miles first. Chillingly then, it is only the children that *hear* the ghosts. This adult exclusion adds to the isolation of the children. Moreover, it allies the audience with the children and allows the audience an empathy with and understanding of the ghosts that the Governess is denied.

The Screw thus emerges on one level as strikingly melodramatic:[32] it is an opera dealing with exaggerated characters in a very human tragedy. Miss Jessel is betrayed by Quint and Miles is cast as the love object, fought over by a male lover, Quint, and a female one, the Governess. Elements of horror are thus woven into an essentially human complex.[33] Moreover, by humanizing Quint – the central character, who is loved by Miss Jessel, Miles and even the Governess (through her identification of him with 'the Master') – the story becomes a multilayered and complex exploration of the tangles of loyalty and amorousness. Yet, by reading Quint and the Governess as doubles this melodramatic 'love complex' collapses in on itself. There is an unsettling oscillation between multiplicity and solipsism in the play of desires and identities here. And as a result, the work questions the possibility of believing in the ghosts, *as ghosts*, at all. Paradoxically, by making them more tangible, their link with the numinous becomes less powerful.[34]

The idea of 'evil' is central to *The Screw*, but its origins and implications remain unresolved. In James's fiction the latent evil within humankind is emphasised, the ghosts 'stand for man's terrible hidden self,'[35] and the tale focuses on the suffering of the 'sinned-against',[36] in this case Miles. The centralisation of suffering and corruption, particularly of the young and vulnerable Miles, is rendered *musically*

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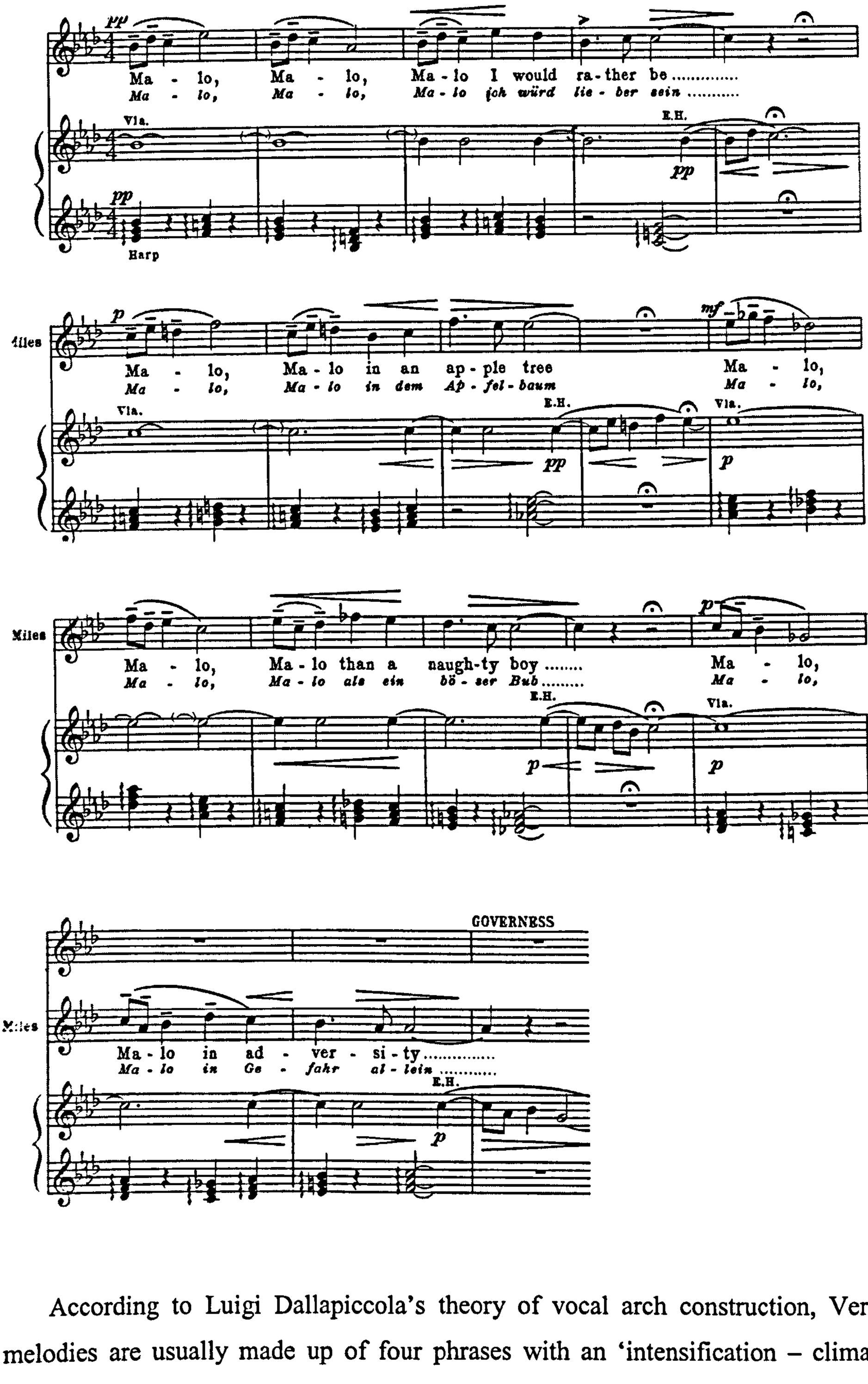
[32] T. J. Lustig, *Henry James and the Ghostly*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 163.
[33] Terry Castle, 'Phantasmagoria: Spectral Technology and the Metaphysics of Modern Reverie', p. 52.
[34] 'Britten's work is an unintended exemplary tale of the implausibility, in the modern age, of ghosts made too solid.' Gary Tomlinson, *Metaphysical Song: An Essay on Opera*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1999, p. 154.
[35] J. A. Ward, 'Henry James and the Nature of Evil', *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 1960, p. 66.
[36] *Ibid.*, p. 69.

ambiguous. The 'evil' of Quint is not condemned outright, as his utterance is seductively compelling and his ideals are not necessarily threatening. The result is thus simultaneously a 'parable' of corruption versus innocence, and an exploration of the motivations of evil and the possibility of non-threatening seductiveness. The ambiguity surrounding the supernatural sightings in James' tale is replaced by the ambiguity of culpability; the work's complex and contradictory 'definition' of sin and corruption themselves.

2. Italianate vocal lines and intensification

It is to Britten's adoption of Verdian vocal arch formation and 'intensification' that we now turn. Miles' rendition of the 'Malo' song in the school-room in act I scene vi is both haunting and beautiful in its simplicity [Fig. 6.3]. The song, appropriated from Quint – and appropriated again by the Governess at the opera's close – is a musical 'quotation' of an unknown rendition. More sinisterly, it may be understood as Quint demonically 'possessing' Miles, speaking through his voice.

Fig. 6.3 Miles' 'Malo' theme, act I scene vi, p. 67-8.



According to Luigi Dallapiccola's theory of vocal arch construction, Verdi's melodies are usually made up of four phrases with an 'intensification – climax –

dissolution' pattern peaking at the end of the third phrase.[37] This intensification is often created through pitch contour, but may be reinforced by other expressive features such as harmonic culmination, dynamic, textural density. In the case of the 'Malo' song, the four phrases that Dallapiccola identifies are clearly evident: A (5), A' (4), B (5), C (4). Despite the irregular phrase lengths (shown in brackets) the melody is also in the form of the lyric prototype, frequently found in Italian opera. The intensification of the first two phrases, achieved through a rising profile from E*b* to F, is accompanied by a crescendo from *pp* to *p* and a sequential transposition up a tone. The climax in phase three of the model is signified by the highest note in the song – G*b* – the *mf* dynamic and a melodic turn towards downward motion. The fourth phrase dissolution is marked by a return to *p* and a melodic fall to A*b*. The melody returns in the orchestra in act II scene iv[38] and at the close of the opera in act II scene viii,[39] this time with an interjection between A' and B, an extended B section and C missing – a sign that closure hasn't been fully reached perhaps, or that Quint's presence is needed to fulfil the purpose of the song.

Interestingly, this Italianate melodic simplicity is not the only coupling of ghostly voices with Verdian processes. Writing in 1951, Britten praised the duets in *La traviata* and *Otello* for different reasons:

> Verdi can, of course, write the obvious square tunes, which use many repetitions of the same little phrase and work to an effective climax. These abound in the earlier operas, and are immediately endearing: I think particularly of *Parigi o cara* in *Traviata*. But he can also write the long casual lines, a succession of apparently unrelated phrases, which repeated hearings discover to have an enormous tension deep below the surface. The wonderful 'conversational' duet at the end of Act I of *Otello* is a case in point.[40]

The 'enormous tension' that he identifies may be usefully explored through the concept of 'intensification', developed from Schoenberg's ideas about *Steigerung*.[41] The processes he describes interact with Dallapiccola's observations and are pivotal in *The Screw*, particularly in the duet in act I scene viii. This duet will be explored in

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[37] Luigi Dallapiccola, 'Words and Music in 19th-century Italian Opera', *The Verdi Companion*, ed. William Weaver and Martin Chusid, London, W. W. Norton & Company, 1979, pp. 133-163.
[38] Benjamin Britten, *The Turn of the Screw*, p. 144.
[39] *Ibid.*, p. 196.
[40] Benjamin Britten, 'Verdi – A Symposium' (1951), *Britten on Music*, p. 102.
[41] Christopher Wintle, '*Was ist Steigerung* (What Intensification Means)', pp. 102-111.

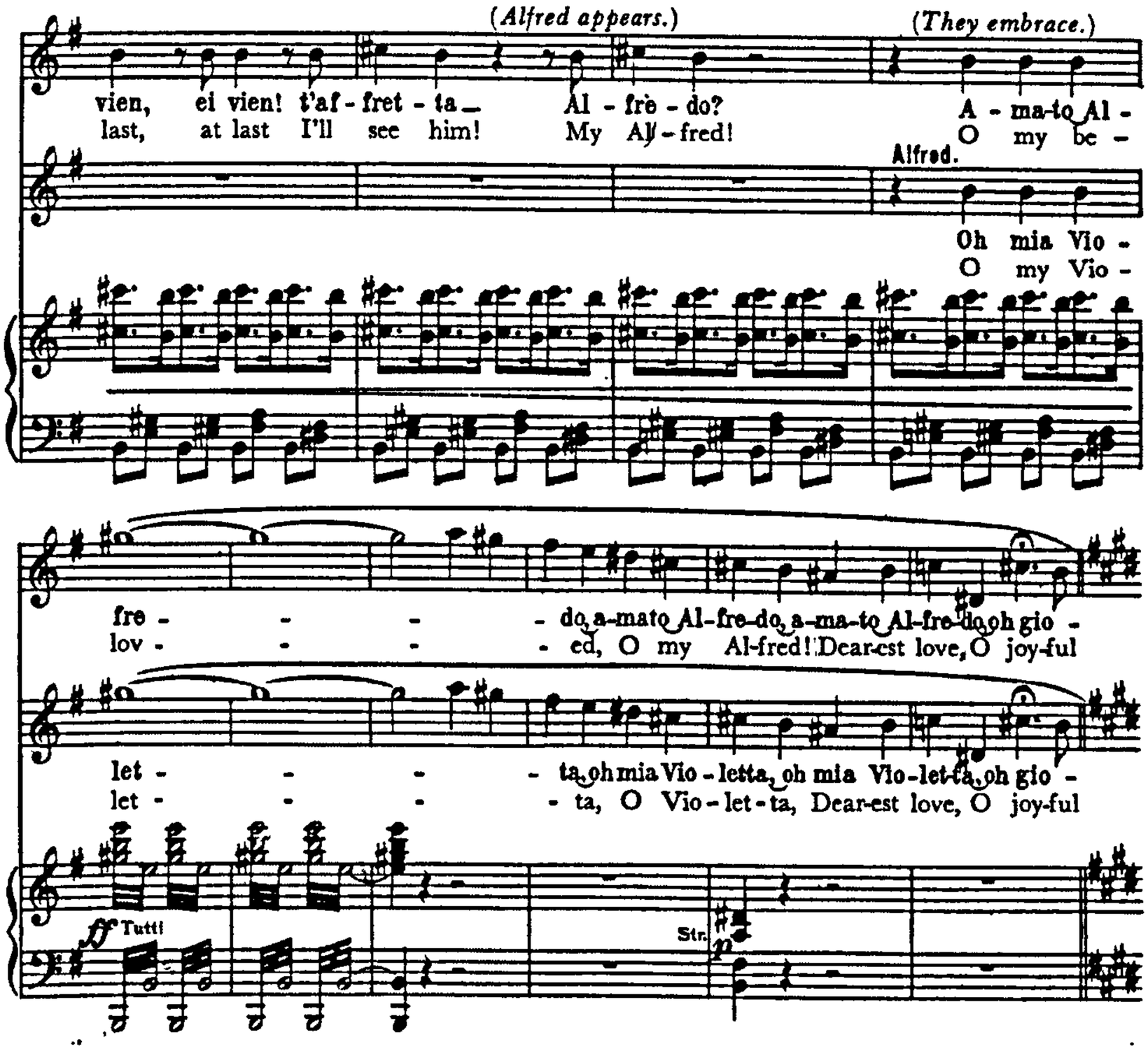
relation to 'Parigi o cara' from *La traviata* and the love duet from the end of act I of *Otello*.

'Parigi o cara' in act III of *La traviata* marks the euphoric return of Alfredo and the tragic realisation of the imminence of Violetta's death. As Britten notes, the duet, particularly the *cavatina*, contains multiple levels of repetition. This is evident at the level of bar, phrase and stanza, which contributes to its complex intensification patterns, both large and small scale. The set piece has five clear parts: (1) *scena*; (2) *tempo d'attacco*; (3) *cavatina*; (4) *tempo di mezzo*; (5) *cabaletta*.

Part one involves a loose *scena*, and the appearance of Alfredo is celebrated by an ecstatic outpouring. The reunion of Violetta with Alfredo is marked by a large climax surging out of the surrounding material: a Verdian *slancio* or moment of euphoric 'transportation'.[42] This is created through insistent accompaniment figures and a crescendo to a *tutti ff tremolando*, supporting a sudden leap to a unison 'stretched' high G for the lovers [Fig. 6.4]. The intensification dissolves as soon as it appears, as the unison vocal contour coils downwards, lingering on a paused C#.

[42] Giuseppe Verdi, *La traviata*, p. 206.

Fig. 6.4 Violetta and Alfredo's reunion, *La traviata*, act II no. 18, p. 207.



Part two consists of an *arioso* duet exchange in E major, with alternating phrases, frequent repetition and a clear high-point of intensification [Fig. 6.5]. (The columns of the following charts represent: protagonist, bar number, structure, phrase length in bars and intensification pattern - I = intensification, C = climax, D = dissolution - with bold upper case letters indicating the main intensification pattern and lower case letters showing smaller, subsidiary intensifications). The first intensification section leads to Alfredo's leap to an accented high G to begin his emphatic falling vocal line in section F. When Violetta repeats the phrase exactly the tension is maintained and directed towards the build-up to the main climax consisting of urgent half-bar phrases. At the climax Violetta and Alfredo join in thirds, crowned by a *ff*, *tutti* cadence.[43] Intensification is created through repetition, shortening phrase lengths and increasingly dense accompanimental patterns. Moreover, the upbeat to the descending gesture in bar 55 creates the impression of unequal phrase lengths between bars 55-59 and 59-62, which contributes to the mounting tension. The dissolution, however, is

[43] *Ibid.*, p. 207.

replaced by one and a half bars of silence, woodwind *pp* sustained chords and another bar of silence; a shocking reminder, perhaps, of Violetta's frailty in the face of her fatal illness.

Fig. 6.5

Alfredo	35	A	*2*	*** I**
Violetta	37	B	*2*	
A	39	C (A' + B')	*4*	
V	43	D	*4*	
A	47	E	*4*	
V	51	E'	*4*	
A	55	F	*4*	
V	59	F'	*4*	
A	62	G	*½*	
V	62	H	*½*	
A	63	I	*½*	
A + V	64	J	*2*	*** C – * D**

Part three, the *andante mosso cavatina* in A*b*, contains complex layers of melodic repetition [Fig. 6.6]. The overall structure is A A B C. In the next layer (column 4), there is an A (8) A' (8) B (4) C (4) pattern within each A section: the large-scale structure is mirrored by the stanza form. The regularity is underlined by the rhyme-scheme of the text. There is a D (8) D (8) E (4) D (8) D (8) E (4) pattern within the B section and a C section characterised by cadenzas. On an even smaller scale the four-bar phrase that begins both Alfredo and Violetta's stanzas is also in a a b c form. These interlocking repetitions give the impression of balance and simplicity. Moreover, the insistent return of the same melodic cells contributes to the intensification trajectory of the *cavatina*. This intensification works on a number of levels: each stanza intensifies towards the third of four sections, and these climaxes are themselves cumulative, leading to the climax at the end of the B section. The main climax is emphasised by the conjunction of Violetta's and Alfredo's vocal lines in thirds. The sense of climax is brief, however, as Violetta's vulnerability and thus the vulnerability of their hopes for happiness is conveyed through the fragmentation and increasing frailty of their utterances. The shift to free cadenza and *a cappella* singing in part C emphasises the point.

Fig. 6.6

Alfredo	84	a a b c	*4*	A	A	* I
	88	d c f g	*4*			
	92	a a b c	*4*	A'		
	96	d c h i	*4*			
	100	j k l m	*4*	B		C
	104	n o p i	*4*	C		D
Violetta	108	a a b c	*4*	A	A	I
	112	d c f g	*4*			
	116	a a b c	*4*	A'		
	120	d c h i	*4*			
	124	j k l m	*4*	B		C
	128	n o p i	*4*	C		D – i
A	131		*4*	D	B	c
V + A	134		*4*			D
A	138		*4*	D		I
V + A	141		*4*			
V + A	145		*4*	E		
A	153		*4*	D		
V + A	156		*4*			
A	160		*4*	D		
V + A	163		*4*			
V + A	167		*9*	E		* C
V + A	176		*2*	F	C	D – i
	178		*Cadenza*			
	179		*Cadenza*			C
	179		*Cadenza*			* D

Part four, the *tempo di mezzo*, consists of a flexible series of phrases and accompaniment repetitions involving a rising chromatic scale with intensification towards a high-point at *'Gran dio!'*[44] reminiscent of the processes identified in the opening *scena*.

[44] *Ibid.*, p. 217.

Part five, the *cabaletta* with *stretta*, is once again an A A' B C form, although the C section is a closely associated with A' material [Fig. 6.7]. At the *più mosso* a D section extension occurs, leading to the climax of the set-piece and of the entire scene. Their unison *ff* cries are a rail against their fate: *'Mio Alfredo, il crudo, il crudo termine serbato al nostro amor!'* ('O tragic fortune and cruel bitter irony, soon again to part!')[45]

Fig. 6.7

Violetta	245	a b c d	*4*	A	**A**	*** I**
	249	a b e f	*4*	A'		
	252	g h i j	*4*	B		
	257	a k l m	*4*	C		c – d
Alfredo	261	a b c d	*4*	A	**A**	i
	265	a b e f	*4*	A'		
	269	g h i j	*4*	B		
	273	a k l m	*4*	C		c – d
A	276		*3 (o)*	D	**B**	i
V	278		*3 (o)*	D		
A V A V	280		*4*	E		
A + V	284		*4*	F		c – d
V (+ A)	291		*4*	A	**A'/C**	i
	295		*4*	A'		
	299		*4*	B		
	303		*4*	C		c – d
A + V	306		*2*	A	**D**	i
	308		*2*	A		
	310		*4*	B		
	314		*6*	C		*** C**
	321		*4*			*** D**

Given the more flexible prose-like style of Piper's text we may expect that such intense and regular melodic repetitions will be missing in *The Screw*. But, in fact, just this type of regularity is evident in the duet of the ghosts in act I scene viii. The

[45] *Ibid.*, p. 222.

overall structure of the scene is: (1) Quint's free *coloratura*; (2) *arioso*; (3) *cavatina*; (4) *scena* (*tempo di mezzo*) duet between Miss Jessel and Flora; (5) *cabaletta* duet for Quint and Miss Jessel; (6) *concertato*; (7) *scena* and dissolution. It is in the *cabaletta* duet that Britten alludes most obviously to this Verdian precedent.

The *cabaletta* in C major for Quint and Miss Jessel (number 5 in the structure description above), marked quick and lively, is a large-scale A A' A"/B C form: the lyric prototype [Fig. 6.8]. It has clear resonance with the 'Parigi o cara' *cavatina* and *cabaletta* described above [Fig. 6.9]. The A section is for Quint only, consisting of an a (4) b (4) c (8) pattern, and A' is an exact repetition of Quint's verse transposed down a third for Miss Jessel. Quint and Miss Jessel then sing A material in canon, with extra elaboration, suggesting both recall and development, and section C consists of a homophonic climax before merging into the subsequent *concertato*.[46] As in the Verdi example a smaller-scale a a' b c pattern is embedded in the A section. The tight construction with internal repetitions is a clear echo of the techniques that Britten identified in *La traviata*. The intensification pattern is also similar: verse intensification climaxing in the end of the third part, leads to a climax in the C section: 'I shall be there!/ You must not fail!'[47] This marks the crux of the ghosts' resolution and a Verdian *parola scenica*. The dissolution is less pronounced, however, as it merges into the subsequent *concertato*.

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[46] Benjamin Britten, *The Turn of the Screw*, p. *97*.
[47] *Ibid.*, p. 97.

Fig. 6.8 The *cabaletta* for Quint and Miss Jessel, *The Turn of the Screw*, act I scene viii, p. 93.

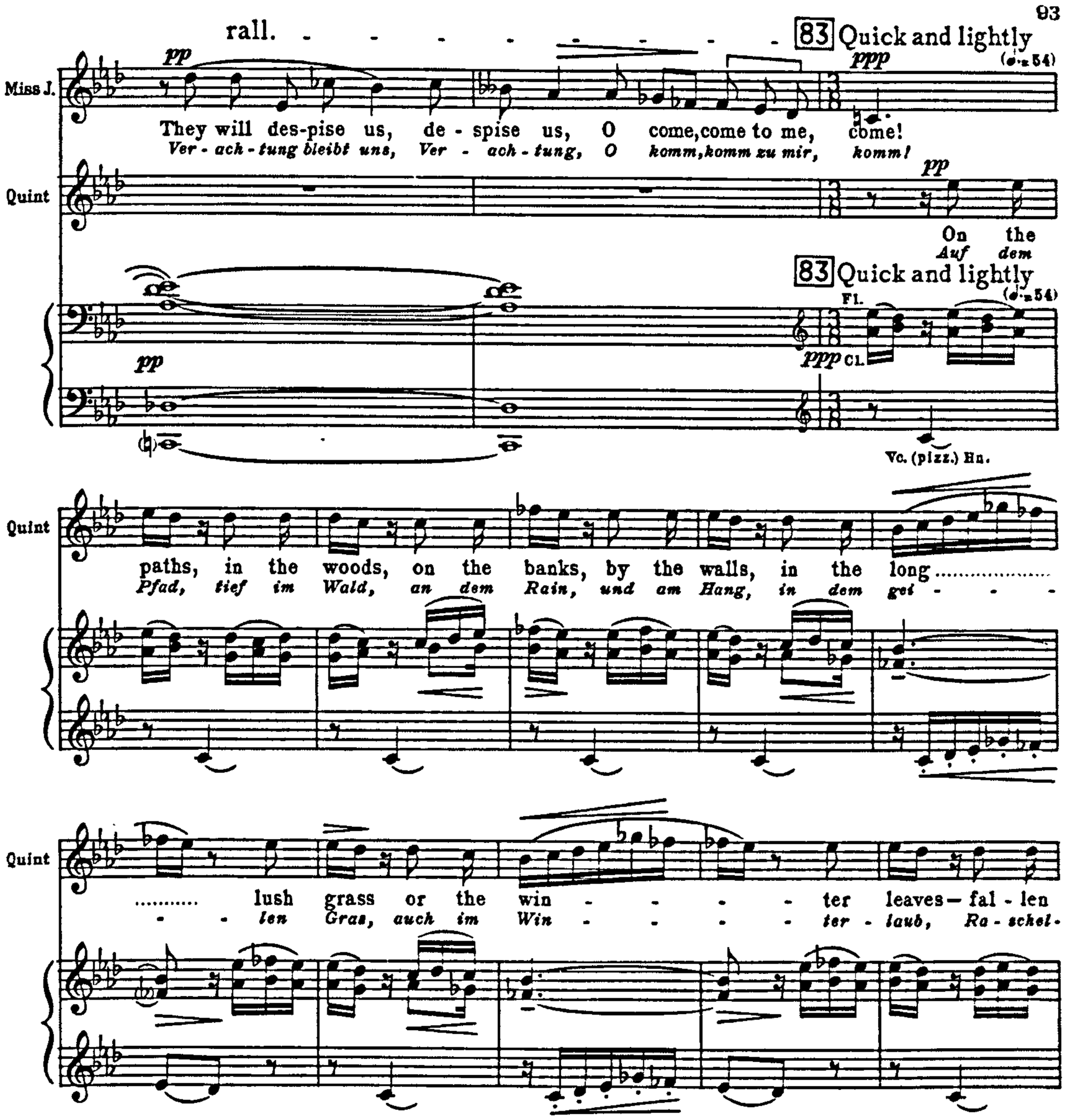

Fig. 6.9

Quint	1	a a' b c	*4*	A	A	* I
	5	d e d e	*4*	B		
	10	a' a" f g f g h i	*8*	C		c – d
Miss Jessel	20	a a' b c	*4*	A	A'	I
(down a third)	24	d e d e	*4*	B		
	29	a' a" f g f g h i	*8*	C		c – d
Q + J	39	Canon: *Quint's verse* shortened	*16*		A"/B	i – c – d

Q + J	55	j k l l	*4*	D	C	
	59	m n o o	*4*	E		
	63	j' k' l' l'	*4*	D'		* C
	67	p q r s	*4*	F		* D

In the search for the Italianate allusions, Quint's *scena* is also significant. His melismatic *coloratura* is the siren call that he uses to seduce Miles. In Abbate's terms he becomes a 'musical voice-object',[48] here, an entity of pure sound. The coiling opulence of the lines in the night air is the very symbol of his alluring eroticism. The florid style is reminiscent of *coloratura* practice, pre-dating Verdi, and the elevation of vocality above textual meaning. Importantly, Britten communicates the allure of Quint's ideas without fully articulating them. Through song he is able to communicate the 'unspeakable': the tension between Quint's 'corrupting' influence, signalled by the Governess' reactions, and the beauty of his utterance mean that a simple interpretation of Quint's intentions is precluded.

But what of the remainder of the duet? Here, intensification also acts powerfully, though with far more flexibility. This is not necessarily a departure from Verdian practice, however. As we have seen, the *scena* sections between the *cavatina* and *cabaletta* in *La traviata* are similarly moulded. Moreover, we may profitably turn to the other duet that Britten praised: the love duet at the close of act I in *Otello*. In this loosely organised duet three dramatic phases may be discerned: (1) lovers' happiness; (2) evocation of shared memories; (3) joyful union. This emotional trajectory is underlined by shifts in accompanimental pattern and vocal shaping: the delicate arpeggios and dotted figures that accompany their recollections of happiness lead to frenzied orchestral flurries as Otello talks of war, and to poignant sustained chords as they declare each other's names at the close. Within each section, internal key wanderings underline its tonal flexibility. Yet, a cohesion and 'tension' is created through intensification, leading to the euphoric emergence of the pivotal 'bacio theme' which occurs in section 3. This intensification involves accompaniment repetitions, tonal direction, and the contour patterns of the voices, marked by interlocking phrases peaking with high G*b*s and A*b*s.

[48] Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 6.

The *tempo di mezzo* section of Britten's duet, featuring Flora and Miss Jessel, contains similar processes. It also consists of three parts – A B A – although the sense of 'return' is not shared by the duet in *Otello*. First, Miss Jessel calls to Flora with increasingly angular contours, culminating in a resounding 'Flora come!'[49] on E*b*, the tonic of the home key. Flora then picks up this note and sings on a monotone: 'I'm here, I'm here,'[50] the textual repetition gives an uncannily disembodied quality. The B section moves to C major and the affect shifts, too. Miss Jessel adopts *f* for her passionate utterance: 'Their dreams and ours can never be one'.[51] Flora replies still with monotone E*b*s, now a 'foreign' tone in the prevailing key. This leads to a section marked 'with movement' in which Miss Jessel invokes a series of suffering, weeping women in mythology – the mermaid, Gerda and Psyche, and Pandora. In section C, E*b* major returns and Flora repeats Miss Jessel's closing words on E*b*. 'Pandora with her dreadful box'[52] is the *ff* climax of the section, before a reprise of A section material. Here, rather than stable intensification arches, we find sudden surges of passion and unexpected dissolutions of tension. Yet, this 'freedom' is tempered by a 'deep tension', suggested by Flora's repeated E*b*s and vocal contour: the highest note for Miss Jessel is on the word 'dreadful'[53] at the end of the B section, forming a balanced overall vocal arch. Like Verdi, Britten allows flexibility to coexist with a deep intensification trajectory.

The theme and variations punctuating the symmetrical structure of *The Screw* also contribute to the intensity profile of the opera on a large scale. This 'expressive intensity' was noted by Malipiero:

> *Il crescendo espressivo, in quest'opera di due soli atti, c'è, cosìche certamente più intensa è la seconda parte della prima, ma purtroppo questo crescendo, anzichè salire alla vetta dell'aspro monte dellla rivelazione psicopatica, si ferma a metà costa, rimanendo letterale, narrativa, piuttosto che musicale e poetica.*[54]

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[49] Benjamin Britten, *The Turn of the Screw*, p. 89.
[50] *Ibid.*, p. 89.
[51] *Ibid.*, p. 89.
[52] *Ibid.*, p. 92.
[53] *Ibid.*, p. 92.
[54] 'There is indeed an expressive crescendo in this two-act opera, so that the second half is certainly more intense than the first, but unfortunately this crescendo, rather than rising to the peak of the steep mountain of psychopathic revelation, stops half way, remaining at the level of literature and the narrative, rather than of music and poetry.' My translation. Riccardo Malipiero, 'Caloroso Successo della Nuova Opera di Britten', *Il Popolo*, Milan, 15 September, 1954.

Although he believes this intensification is not achieved fully in the second act, he does note the gradual build-up. The form, as has been frequently discussed, moves through a 12-tone sequence[55] in a rising and falling pattern of keys, creating an intensification at the central point: 'The ceremony of innocence is drowned'.[56] This key pattern is: Act I (a, b, c, d, e, f, g, a*b*) act II (f, eb, c#, c, b*b*, all 12 tones, a). Intensification patterns thus contribute to a journey from tranquillity to fear as the opera's events unfold in a 'striptease show' of suspense. As one secret is revealed after another, one 12-tone note is revealed after another.

I would argue, however, that the second act does maintain this tension and that the final scene achieves a cumulative effect, due to its invocation of earlier musics and through its inner intensification pattern, leading to the tragic climax of the opera, Miles' cry beyond song: 'Peter Quint, you Devil!' [57] After a long *scena* between the Governess and Miles the climax draws near. Quint sings material from his previous *cavatina* ('On the paths in the woods') in A*b* while the Governess' part is layered above it in C major.[58] They emerge from this bitonality into C major, as Quint crosses the 'key divide' towards the living Miles. And at this key revelation Miles dies. The break from song, the shattering of melody into a harsh shout is the fracture that reveals the heart of the tragedy. There is a sustained climax as the Governess and Quint sing together, leading to dissolution as Quint says farewell. A slow *scena* of recognition follows, while the Governess realises Miles' death, leading to another smaller climax with the resurgence of 'Malo', and a final tailing away of the theme. It is a thematic summation, recalling Quint's *cavatina* and the 'Malo' song, as well as a summation of the tension built across the work.

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[55] Arnold Whittall, 'Fulfilment or Betrayal?' *The Musical Times*, Vol. 140, No. 1869, 1999, pp. 11-21; Harry White, 'The Holy Commandments of Tonality', *The Journal of Musicology*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 1991, pp. 254-268.
[56] Benjamin Britten, *The Turn of the Screw*, p. 109.
[57] *Ibid.*, p. 194.
[58] *Ibid.*, p. 192.

3. Distorted intensification, disquieting voices

Dramatic and musical tension is not only created through expected intensification gradients, but through their disruption. One such unsettling disturbance occurs in act I scene v. Here, the Governess has just sighted the spectre of Quint in the window and comes to Mrs Grose in a state of agitation [Fig. 6.10]. Their *scena* discussion consists of short fragmented exchanges, and the Governess' diction is accented and angular, as though she is defending herself from her emotions by adopting an external coldness. This restraint continues through her physical descriptions of Quint.[59] When she comes near to realising the nature of her sighting this calm becomes a hushed and tense 'horror'.[60] Immediately, the celesta sonority comes back as Mrs Grose realises the identity of the figure: 'Quint! Peter Quint!'[61] Oscillations between D# and E and the florid accompaniment suggest agitation, but the phrase leads to a *pp* dissolution and a bar of silence, with a pause of suspense. It is thus shocking when Mrs Grose suddenly breaks into a lamenting tempest of emotion: 'Dear God, is there no end to his dreadful ways?'[62] In a slow and broad tempo, marked *f* with a *ffz* chord she proceeds in large sobbing descending cries. Thus, what appeared as dissolution of tension, of the boundary between one closed section and another, is revealed as a silent intensification towards an outpouring of emotion. The silent tension, however, renders Mrs Grose's cry deeply troubling, an unsettling voice created through the distortion of the expected intensification arch. The remainder of the scene is unified by this phrase as it becomes a recurring theme, and only then is the tension finally allowed to disperse.

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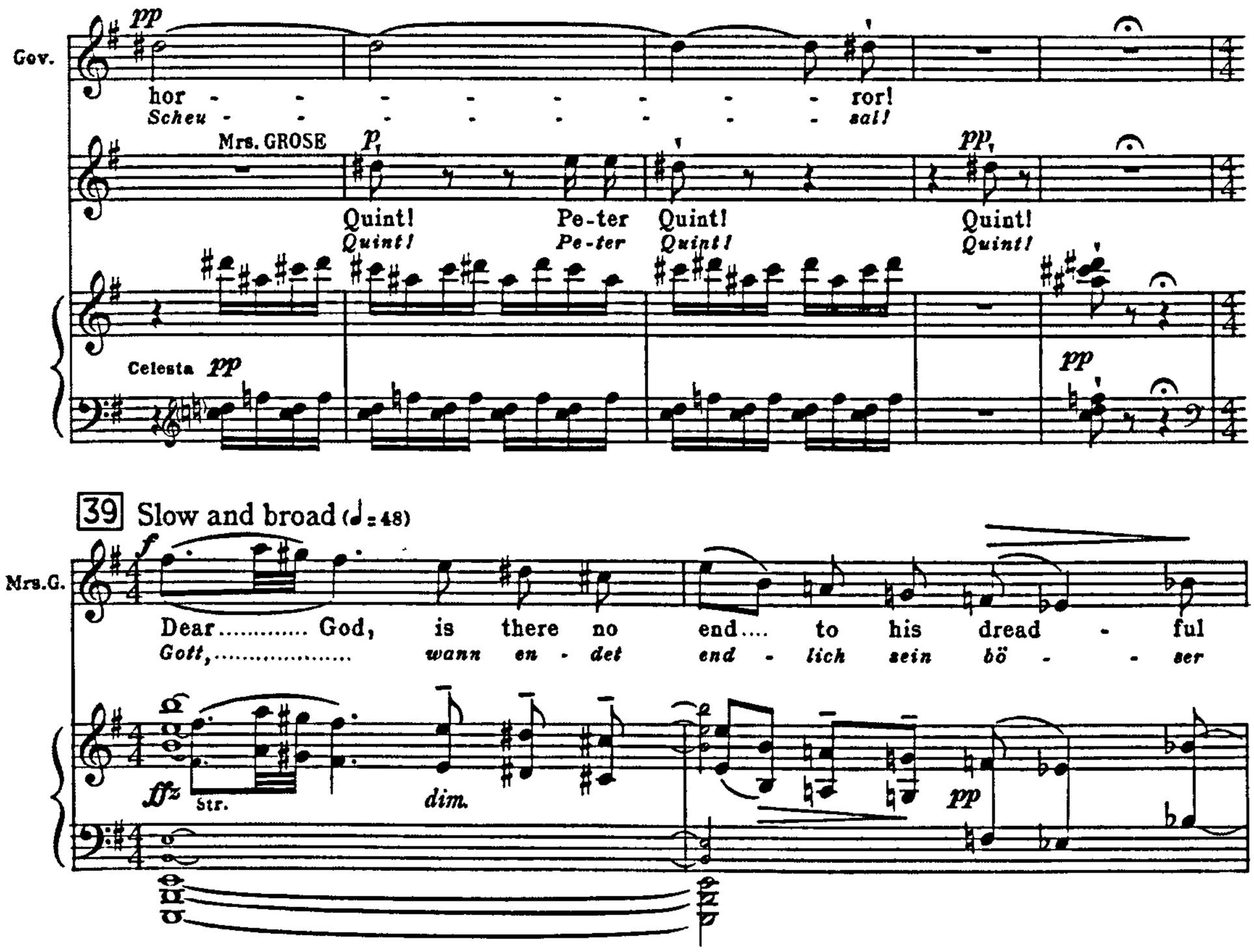
[59] *Ibid.*, p. 49-50.
[60] *Ibid.*, p. 50.
[61] *Ibid.*, p. 50.
[62] *Ibid.*, p. 50.

Fig. 6.10 Mrs Grose's revelation, *The Turn of the Screw*, act I scene v, p. 50.



The ghosts also speak with disquieting voices: for example Miss Jessel's cry in act II scene iii. Here, Miss Jessel and the Governess 'meet' in the school room and participate in an antithetical duet, with Miss Jessel lamenting over her tragic plight and the pain of Quint's betrayal. Her repetitions of 'Alas, alas!',[63] sighing figures sinking from *Db* to C highlight her suffering. (In general, Miss Jessel's part is characterised by her low tessitura and low instruments and Quint's part is characterised by his high tessitura and the timbre of the celesta, suggesting a ghostly gender-swap that contributes to the 'uncanny' nature of their utterances). The Governess on the other hand is forceful, attempting to banish this vision, passionately crying: 'You horrible, terrible woman!'[64] Once again this appears to be the close of the duet, the point at which vocal flowering will come to an end. But instead there is a sharp intensification that leads to a cry from Miss Jessel: 'Alas!'[65] rising to high A, an allusion to Verdian build-up and *slancio*. Yet it is cut half-way, her utterance hangs

[63] *Ibid.*, p. 138.
[64] *Ibid.*, p. 139.
[65] *Ibid.*, p. 139.

poised before an abyss of nothingness, the sense of incompletion heightening her spookiness. Even the vocal swoop downwards at the end of the note leaves a disquieting sense of non-dissolution and of her utterance being severed.

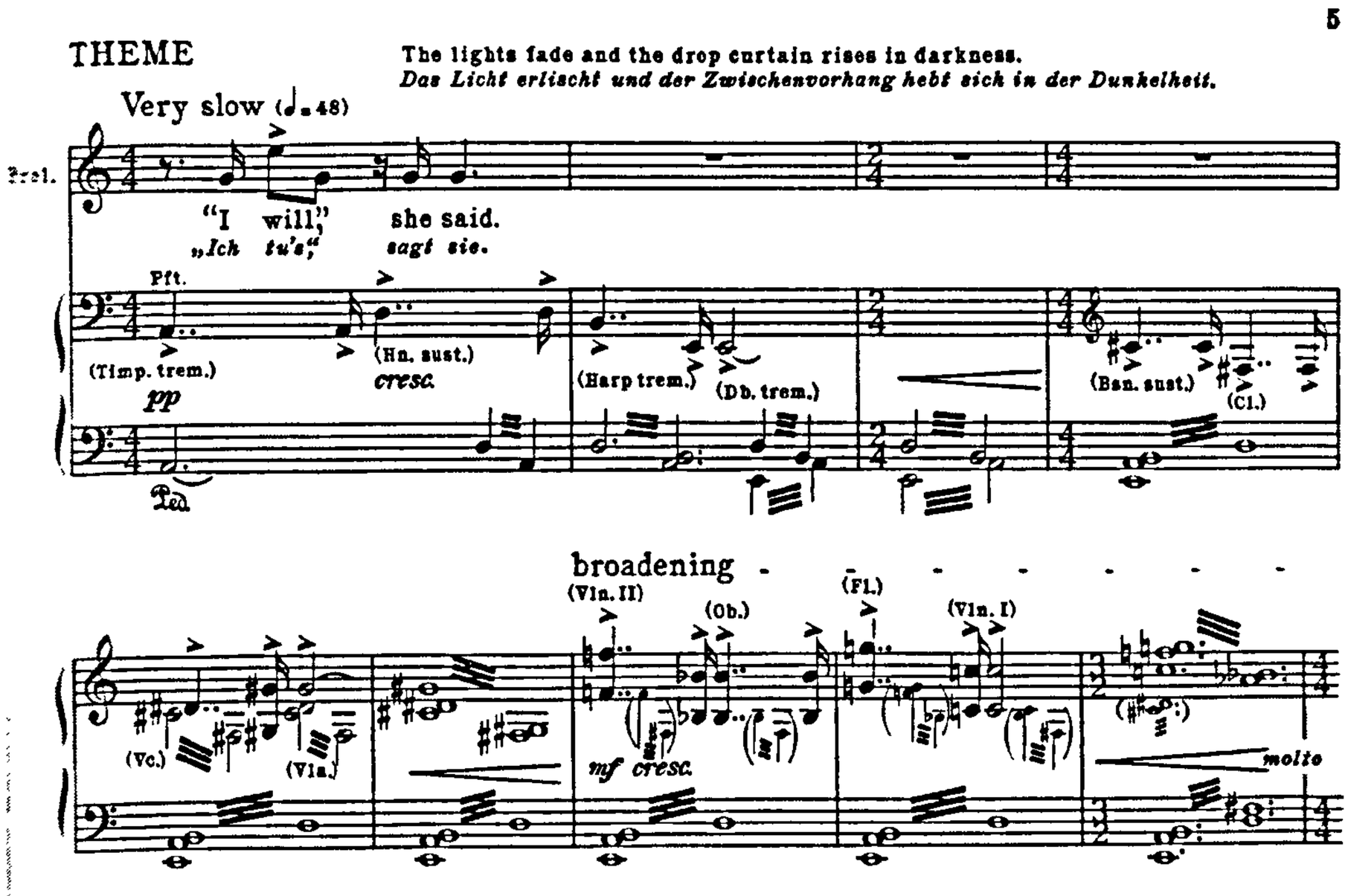
Notably, such dislocations of voice, such distortions of intensification gradient not only create a sense of disconcertion in the audience, but occur at moments of extreme emotional intensity. It is as though here both Mrs Grose and Miss Jessel break out of the 'confines' of the vocal arch to express deep feelings, fracturing the text for a moment to vent their profound hurts and loneliness. There could also be some sadism in the cutting off of Miss Jessel's song, of shutting the door on her suffering. She disappears at the close of the work with no resolution, in a forced and perpetual state of suffering; forever caught in the affect of her lamenting cry: 'Alas!'

4. The spectres of other musics, uncanny appropriations

As well as absorbing Verdian processes, and expressing extreme affects through their distortions, *The Turn of the Screw* is criss-crossed with other allusions to extrinsic music, ranging from Wagnerian leitmotivs and Verdian 'recurring themes' to self-conscious and often uncanny references to works by Stravinsky, Mozart and Gamelan.

Much emphasis has been placed in the literature on *leitmotivic* working: 'the screw theme' [Fig. 6.11] and 'thread' theme weave a dense web through the drama. As well as the theme and variation structure, the nod in the direction of Wagner and his notion of 'symphonic' development contributes to the work's tendency towards 'absolute' music.

Fig. 6.11 'The screw theme', *The Turn of the Screw*, p. 5.



Wagner, too, of course dealt with ghosts and 'phantasmagoria', and *The Flying Dutchman* is an interesting example in relation to Britten's opera. In Wagner's music drama death is sought for, the Dutchman is consumed by the desire for a 'second death' to cite Slovoj Žižek's interpretation;[66] he is looking for release. In contrast it seems that although Britten has some sympathy for his ghosts he does not aim to set them truly 'free'. Miss Jessel disappears without trace along with the tormented figure of Flora before the final scene, and Quint leaves with no suggestion of rest for his own tortured spirit. In this sense, *The Turn of the Screw* is as much a tragedy for the 'un-dead' as it is for Miles: no promise of transcendence or ultimate respite is made here.

Verdian 'recurring themes' also emerge to great effect in the score. If such 'recurring themes' are understood as larger stretches of music used sparingly to evoke characters or dramatic themes, then such recurrences include the range of typically Brittenesque 'concrete' colour recollections and key associations, as we have seen in previous chapters:

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[66] Slavoj Žižek and Mladen Dolar, *Opera's Second Death*, London, Routledge, 2002.

- Quint's celesta and E*b* major: when the Governess discovers that Miles is dismissed from his school (p. 25); as the Governess sights Quint in the tower (p. 37); as the Governess sees Quint in the window (p. 46); as Quint calls Miles in the night (p. 82/7); as Quint pleads with Miles in the final scene (p. 187).

- Miss Jessel's low woodwind and clarinet: when she is sighted across the lake (p. 76); during her lament in the schoolroom (p. 134).

- The canonic songs of the children, shared by the ghosts, form an important link between their musical worlds: As the children prepare for the Governess' arrival (p. 11); as they sing their play-songs 'Lavender's blue' (p. 27) and 'Tom, Tom, the Piper's son' (p. 42); a canon for the ghosts 'On the paths, in the woods' (95); Flora sings 'Cat's cradle' with Mrs Grose (163).

However, the recurring themes in *The Turn of the Screw* are frequently more complex. They describe shifting relationships and multifarious reactions rather than concrete subjects:

- 'On the paths, in the woods': this occurs in Quint's and Miss Jessel's duet (p. 93) as well as the final scene (p. 192).

- The 'Malo' theme: Miles sings the song in the schoolroom (p. 67) where it is suggested that he learnt the theme from Quint. It then returns in the prelude to the bedroom scene, before Miles sings it again, to suggest that his thoughts are turning to his spectral friend (p. 144). By the final scene the theme is thus symbolic of Miles' close relationship with Quint, which may even be understood as ownership (p. 196). When voiced by the Governess, however, it appears that the theme becomes symbolic of Miles himself, as though his being is deeply shaped by Quint's influence. In this moment of lament, the recurrence may also be understood as a suggestion of the Governess's remorse – for her conduct? For Miles's death?

- The Governess's reaction to the ghosts: when the Governess sights Quint in the tower (p. 38), the agitated figuration that accompanies her fright returns in the orchestra when she sees Quint at the window (p. 47).

As Abbiati noted: 'Ch-egli predilige eclettici ma aggiornatissimi' ('[Britten] chooses to be both eclectic and totally up to date').[67] Thus, as opposed to the deep associations between Verdian and Wagnerian processes suggested above, other self-

[67] Franco Abbiati, '"Il Giro di Vite" di Britten'.

conscious and eclectic musical allusions contribute to the work's eerie atmosphere. These sonic illustrations suggest certain 'literal' couplings of dramatic context with musical representation; a tendency to illustrate the opera's décor in every scene. Yet the familiarity of these 'appropriations' mingles with Britten's unsettling treatment of them. Through juxtaposition and distortion Britten renders them uncanny.[68]

Firstly, there is a clear Stravinskian tone in 'The Journey' (act I scene i) and 'The Bells' (act II scene ii). An insistent ostinato pattern is established after the theme as a tutti *ff* driving rhythm, suggesting the pounding of horses' hooves as the Governess is driven to Bly. The rhythm is absorbed into scene I as a timpani pattern, pattering under the Governess' recitative. Timpani are similarly used in the 'Traveller scene' in *Death in Venice* and in Tarquinius's ride to Rome in *The Rape of Lucretia*, both of which have erotic associations. Here, any sexual suggestion may relate to the Governess' veiled experience of 'seduction' as she was offered the job by the Master. The theme is identically repeated, manipulated only occasionally by rhythmic extensions. Thus, although Stravinskian in its sound, it is layered with a free and unstable melody, rather than layered ostinati.[69]

Another Stravinskian association occurs in the church scene, this time with uncanny results. In light of Britten's enthusiasm for *The Symphony of Psalms* it is likely that the 'religiosity' of the scene suggested a resonance with this sound world. In this case it is the repetition of bell combinations, static harmonies, tensely held solemn chords and the presence of Latin text that suggest allusion to a Stravinskian model. Once again, however, Britten creates an impression of the original, taking certain elements as 'symbols' or 'tokens' of his work and allowing them to stand out within his own musical language. In this setting, the children's fake 'ecclesiastical' texts create a tension between the musical symbolism and textual meaning, a clash of the sacred and the profane. The 'coldness' of their texts and the presence of the bells also recall the hard, chilling tones of Quint. This is rendered all the more uncanny due to the scene's juxtaposition with the preceding and following material. Indeed,

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[68] Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny', *Art and Literature*, Trans. James Strachey, London, Penguin Books, 1990, pp. 335-376.

[69] Gretchen Horlacher, 'The Rhythms of Reiteration: Formal Development in Stravinsky's Ostinati', *Music Theory Spectrum*, Vol. 14, No. 2, 1992, pp. 171-187; Gretchen Horlacher, 'Running in Place: Sketches and Superimposition in Stravinsky's Music', *Music Theory Spectrum*, Vol. 23, No. 2, 2001, pp. 196-216.

Stravinsky's predilection for juxtaposition and surprise is also evident in Britten's large-scale planning as he embeds these eclectic elements.

Secondly, as well as suggesting associations with *coloratura*, Quint's melismas resonate with, and were according to Carpenter inspired by, the music of Perotin. As he explains, 'The melismas … with which Quint seductively calls Miles's name in the night scene may seem like an oriental charm, but it has its origin in a piece of medieval church music, a setting of *Beata Viscera* by Perotin, sung by Pears in Aldeburgh Church a few months before Britten composed *The Turn of the Screw*'.[70] The metallic sonorities associated with Quint also invoke the sounds and textures of gamelan, as discussed by Cooke.[71] Quint's voice is thus rendered uncanny through anachronous musical references to the musical past and evocation of the exotic. He 'appropriates' sound and in doing so is defined as 'other'.

Thirdly, a diegetic 'intrusion' of a mock-Mozartian piano piece played by Miles appears in act II scene vi. The piano texture begins in variation xiii and is clearly signalled by the Alberti bass figurations and florid turns in the 'Classical' upper line. However, the melody becomes gradually more tonally distant from its accompaniment, the C major bass clashing with the sharp-side tendency of the flashy scale passages above it. (The showiness of this rendition and Miles' subsequent praise has a tempting biographical resonance with Britten's own childhood experiences in 'heaven' playing to his adoring, though demanding, mother.) Not only is this a pastiche, then, but it is uncannily distorted. Miles is again possessed by Quint, perhaps. This time the uncanny is not in its setting, but in the gradual distortions of the musical reference: the familiar made fearful. Moreover, it melds into the background of the scene as Flora puts Mrs Grose to sleep before its triumphant resurgence in variation xiv. The 'authorship' of the music is thus questioned as it penetrates into the subsequent variation. If the music is understood as another manifestation of Quint's influence, it may be understood as a further example of his aural presence extending beyond the confines of the scenes. Indeed, he is the only character who crosses this line – suggesting a certain 'authorial' sympathy, or even that he is secretly influencing the events as they unfold.

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[70] Humphrey Carpenter, *Benjamin Britten: A Biography*, p. 340.
[71] Mervyn Cooke, *Britten and the Far East.*

Furthermore, a tension is created between the uncanny eclecticism of these appropriations and the schematic impulse towards 'absolute' music in the work. As Britten observed: 'A firm and secure musical structure … can safely hold together and make sense of one's wildest fantasies'.[72] Thus, these constantly shifting, juxtaposed and layered musics – Britten's 'fantasies' – create a sense of disorientation, which contributes to the troubling impression of the score. This fragmentation, this play with 'voice', blurs authorial agency. And, as in James' tale, it is in the blanks and turns of this 'shattered' musical surface that affective power resides.

The Turn of the Screw is thus rife with tensions: between the allure and danger of Quint; the genres of horror and melodrama; Verdian intensification and its violent distortions; the familiar and eerie appropriations of other music. And it is in its permeability, in its status as an 'open text' inviting parallel readings that the opera's uncanny nature resides. Verdi is just one of the musical 'spectres' that haunts the work.

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[72] Michael Kennedy, *Britten*, p. 191.

Chapter VII

'Tragical Mirth':[1]
Intertextual Parody in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

When the Mechanicals gather in the Athenian court to play their part in the marriage festivities of Theseus and Hippolyta they introduce their work as a 'tragical mirth', making explicit the play of comic and tragic elements that infuse the work as a whole. Their play-within-a-play is a parody enactment of the tragedy of Pyramus and Thisby, and the fact that Bottom and his fellow 'actors' fail to recognise the humour of their performance heightens the mirth. In another layer of complexity, the entirety of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* has been identified as a parody of the Theseus myth,[2] intensifying further the complex generic mixture and multiple reversals that characterise Shakespeare's work.

As in *Albert Herring*, Britten's setting of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* alludes to techniques derived from Verdian comic opera, particularly self-conscious 'diegetic' song and musical caricature. The generic mixture inherent in Shakespeare's play is paralleled by Britten's tragi-comic music, particularly in the play-within-a-play of the final act. In this scene – a *musical* enactment of the tale of Pyramus and Thisby – Britten incorporates a playful, sparkling inter-textual parody. Italian operatic tragedy becomes the direct focus of musical humour, as specific allusions to Donizetti as well as more generic allusions to the nineteenth-century Italian tradition shared by Verdi, are subverted. This scene thus has far-reaching implications not only for this opera but for Britten's wider oeuvre: his relationship with the Italianate is characterised, here, by an increasing critical 'distance' that comes close to ridicule. The powerful tensions

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[1] William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, act V scene i, London, New Penguin, 1995, p. 109.
[2] Douglas Freake, '*A Midsummer Night's Dream* as a Comic Version of the Theseus Myth', *A Midsummer Night's Dream: Critical Essays*, ed. Dorothea Kehler, New York, Garland, 1998, pp. 259-274.

between allusion to Verdian comic elements and their subversion are investigated here through analysis of Bottom's song, the rehearsals of the Mechanicals (act I) and the opera-within-opera (act III).

1. Comic utterance

One of the most witty and visually amusing moments in Shakespeare's play occurs when Bottom is transformed into an ass in act II scene i. Due to Oberon's purple potion he becomes the beloved of Tytania and in a bower, surrounded by her fairies, she seduces him. The scene in Britten's opera is equally comic, with the emphasis shifting from linguistic to musical humour. Left alone and frightened in the wood Bottom sings a 'diegetic' song about birds to maintain his courage: 'The woosell cock, so black of hue, with orange tawny bill'.[3] The song's comedy relies on exaggerated and cheeky musical mimesis, for example the falsetto 'shriek' on 'Taw-ny owl',[4] and is sung roughly and heavily. The rhythm, too, is disrupted: a false emphasis at the end of each bar is created through the addition of an accented spread triplet, disrupting the regularity of the 3/2 time signature. The humour is heightened further through destabilising word placements, which interrupt the scansion of the line: in the midst of a syllabic setting some syllables are spread un-idiomatically over two notes.

Tytania's subsequent reaction adds another layer to this comedy, as she cries: 'What angel wakes me from my flow'ry bed?'[5] After another verse, sung by Bottom in a lively 4/4 due to his bubbling enthusiasm in reaction to her praise, she asks him *not* to stop. The accuracy of her musical perception is thus brought into question. Unlike the 'diegetic' moments found in Verdian opera (for example the mock-serenade in *Falstaff* discussed in chapter three), where we assume that the characters on stage hear the same music as those in the audience, here a tension is created between the two. The makeshift song, perceived by the audience as comical, is perceived by Tytania as a sweet and amorous serenade. Her mishearing of the verses resonates uncomfortably with the bawdy song we have just heard, the disjunction

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[3] Benjamin Britten, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Op. 64, London, Boosey & Hawkes, 1960, p. 126.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 126.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 127.

adding tension and thus humour. Through this musical/verbal jolt, Britten suggests that Tytania's hearing as well as her sight has been altered by the love juice.

Bottom's love of music – 'the tongs and the bones'[6] – is also exploited for comic purpose. When Bottom asks the fairies to make music for him, Britten produces two humorous dances: a quick march and a jig. They are scored for recorders, blocks and cymbals, glory in shrillness and are exaggeratedly repetitive. Because of the fairies' status as 'children' the moment is also evocative of school music-making, adding another layer of comic association, redolent of the song rehearsals in *Albert Herring*. This time we laugh at the musical perception of *Bottom* whose mis-hearing is all the more amusing as we assume that his perceptions are not altered by magic but betray the eccentricity of his own musical ear. (This also brings into question issues of musical taste – could it be true that Bottom *really* loves the music that we, the audience, perceive as humorous?)

So far, the comic techniques displayed here refer to the Verdian devices found in *Albert Herring*, most notably comic exaggeration and self-conscious, diegetic music-within-music. Yet, this time the musical parody that Britten employs is even more self-conscious: it highlights and plays with the exaggerations of song-setting, emphasising the 'norms' and idiosyncrasies of operatic utterance. This is heightened due to the distancing achieved as a result of the dramatic motif of enchantment, which opens the door to a more self-reflecting musical world. In the magical wood, where things are not what they seem, a space is created for exaggeration and excessive artifice. Indeed, the emphasis on vocal display intrinsic to the genre of Italian opera appears to be the specific target of humour, especially in the exaggerated diction of Bottom's mock-serenade. Britten walks a thin line between respecting his models and ridiculing them, and it is one that will become even thinner.

The self-consciousness of this parody is heightened in the rehearsals for the play-within-a-play (act I). The humour is frequently mimetic and achieved through vocal diction, created by means of exaggeration, excessive melodramatic gestures and

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[6] *Ibid.*, p. 130.

impersonation, which results in a colourful musical scene characterised by the constant masking and un-masking of vocal costume.

Firstly, repetition is exaggerated as the Mechanicals pretend to be characters in 'Pyramus and Thisby'. For example, Bottom outlines his preference for the part of a tyrant, during which the elaborate text is set to regal dotted rhythms with such repetitive vocal contours that it becomes an extreme caricature. His self-conscious impersonation is indicated by the subsequent observation: 'This was lofty'.[7] Secondly, there is an array of musical 'literalisms', for example the descending line that sets Flute's phrase: 'I have a beard coming'.[8] Another instance of this is Bottom's excessively mimetic setting of 'monstrous little voice' (sung *ff*) and 'Thisne' (sung *pp* and falsetto). The humour of this musical 'literalism' is highlighted by Flute's shrieks on the word 'shriek'.[9] Thirdly, musical affects are exaggerated and often incongruent. Flute/Thisby talks of 'most radiant'[10] Pyramus to a sequence of repeated phrases, marked *lento* and *pp*. At a shift of affect in the text - 'most briskly juvenal' - there is an abrupt change from flat-side lyricism to a *vivo* in D major.[11] Thus, incongruence and exaggeration of clichés are perceived together. Fourthly, the techniques of 'theatrical' presentation are rendered comic: the wall and the moon are cast as singing characters, and when Bottom attempts his speech to 'Thisby',[12] it is slow and heavy as though he is struggling to read from a script (the same comic device used in the Mayor's May Day speech in *Albert Herring*). As Shakespeare draws attention to the conventions of his own play by staging a rehearsal, Britten does the same with music.

2. Opera-within-opera

The self-reflexive parody of the work reaches its peak in the opera-within-opera, which is an overt parody of the Italian tradition. This is underlined by the fact that Pears was originally cast as Flute/Thisby and based his comic performance on that of Joan Sutherland in Zeffirelli's production of Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* in February 1959 (which he attended at the Opera House Covent Garden).

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[7] *Ibid.*, p. 51.
[8] *Ibid.*, p. 53.
[9] *Ibid.*, p. 59.
[10] *Ibid.*, p. 117.
[11] *Ibid.*, p. 118.
[12] *Ibid.*, p. 114.

> Myfanwy Piper says that Pears made Thisbe into 'a really wicked imitation of Joan Sutherland', both in appearance and vocal mannerisms. George Malcolm, who conducted the second performance at Aldeburgh, says Pears was so funny that 'I could hardly keep my place in the score for laughing'.[13]

Describing the premiere, Desmond Shawe-Taylor wrote:

> Mr Brannigan's Verdian heroics as Pyramus, and Mr Pears's quasi-mad scene as a saffron-clad Thisbe were very funny, even though the actual musical parodies are not subtle.[14]

The 'camp' humour of the scene, intensified by Pears's acting in the role of Flute/Thisby, may well have been the catalyst for his later re-casting as Lysander, in an attempt to limit the overt homoeroticism of the work. However, this play with sexual innuendo and queering is also intrinsic to the role of the Mechanicals in Shakespeare's play. As Douglas E. Green observes: 'The burlesque elements of the "love" between Flute's Thisby and Bottom's Pyramus, the meta-theatricality of a performance in which even the Wall and the Moon are in drag … hint at [homoerotic] desires.'[15]

In choosing to parody Italian opera, Britten was one in a long line of comic opera and burlesque composers. Verdian opera was frequently burlesqued in Britain in the nineteenth century[16] as Roberta Marvyn notes, and parody opera more generally has a long history stretching back to vaudeville, harlequinade and pantomime. Offenbach was a central contributor to the genre and he, too, wrote *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1855), which ridiculed the English as lovers.[17] Moreover, his *Mr Cauliflower's Party* (1861) features the rehearsal of an opera with Italianate allusions, including a parody of a Bellinian duet, a Verdian quartet (resonating with the one in the last act of *Rigoletto*) and a Rossinian ensemble.[18] Also relevant is Suppé's *Das Pensionat*

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[13] Humphrey Carpenter, *Benjamin Britten: A Biography*, p. 395.
[14] Desmond Shawe-Taylor, *Sunday Times*, 12 June 1960.
[15] Douglas E. Green, 'Preposterous Pleasures: Queer Theories and A Midsummer Night's Dream', *A Midsummer Night's Dream: Critical Essays*, pp. 369-400.
[16] Roberta Montemorra Marvin, 'Verdian Opera Burlesqued: A Glimpse into Mid-Victorian Theatrical Culture', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, Vol. 15, No. 1, March 2003, pp. 33-66.
[17] George Colerick, *From the Italian Girl to Cabaret: Musical Humour, Parody and Burlesque*, London, Juventus, 1998, p. 18.
[18] *Ibid.*, p. 20.

(1860), which recalls the sextet from Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*. In the English tradition, Gilbert and Sullivan were key players: *Trial by Jury* recalls Bellini's *Sonnambula*, *The Sorcerer* alludes to *Elisir d'amore* and *The Pirates of Penzance* parodies the conventions of Verdian tragedy. (As we saw in chapter five, however, due to Britten's critical attitude towards their works, it is unlikely that he would have wished to openly emulate them.)

An important precedent for Britten, therefore, may have been Holst's one-act opera *The Perfect Fool*, particularly as Imogen Holst was a close associate of Britten and Pears during the 1960s. Somewhat surprisingly, the 'Wagnerian' parody includes a troubadour – a mock-Verdian tenor and lover – whose utterance is coloured by humorous repetition, incongruence and incessant cliché. When the troubadour is presented to the Princess in the first scene he sings a 6/8 *allegretto cavatina* in B*b* major, with a kitsch Verdian chordal accompaniment. The verse is structured in four four-bar phrases, in an a a' b c pattern: the lyric prototype. Comedy is heightened by the brief cadenza at the close, with its amusing note repetitions on D leading to a mock-sensuous *tenuto*. That this is an Italian parody is emphasised by the cries of '*bravo*'[19] (and counter cries of 'shh') from the chorus, who also sing a chorus theme to 'la'. In the second verse the troubadour sings self-reflectively about his own singing style: 'Of all my country's singers,/ men say that I am the greatest;/ My voice is mellow and free,/ It can wander high and low.'[20] Here mimetic comedy is abundantly present, as Holst marks the word 'free' *ad lib* and 'high' is set to a high A, while 'low' is sung on a low B. Exaggerated cadenza ornamentation follows, which is answered by coloratura from the princess. The third verse is an *animato* section sung on repetitions of 'Ah'.[21] The singers openly compete with each other, the troubadour rising to high G and the princess to a cadenza on high B. Falsetto is also used comically: the troubadour alternates between a *f* high A, and a falsetto *pp* high B. The princess responds with a triumphant ascent to a lingering high C. The final verse consists of a repetition of the troubadour's first verse, sung to different words by the

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[19] Gustav Holst, *The Prefect Fool*, piano arr. Vally Lasker, London, Novello, 1923, p. 54.
[20] *Ibid.*, p. 54-55.
[21] *Ibid.*, p. 55-56.

princess, who dismisses him with an embellished 'farewell'[22] and another showy cadenza, consisting of comically predictable rising sequences and a trill.

Surprisingly, Imogen Holst points to the 'sincerity' of the aria in its context:

> The arrival of the Verdi Troubadour is a welcome relief, for he brings flowing continuity to his music. His song is only a parody, but it seems surprisingly real in the middle of all the ingenious cross-rhythms, while his emotion, intended to be fictitious, has a disconcerting way of sounding genuine after so many brittle fourths.'[23]

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, however, the opera-within-opera appears far from 'real', and techniques of intertextual parody come to the fore: two texts – the framing opera and the meta-opera – comment on one another. According to Esti Sheinberg, in meta-opera parody is produced through the adoption of 'an ironic utterance, the layers of which are embedded in two or more incongruent encoded texts ... In its reference to pre-existing texts (works of art, styles, etc.) that implicitly present a critical and/or polemical commentary, parody is simultaneously a text and a meta-text.'[24] In his formulation, the self-conscious embedding of strongly allusive elements in a new context leads to 'trans-contextualisation', and it is the incongruity between the texts that is perceived as humorous.[25] Indeed, there is a double layer of parody at work here, as not only is the meta-opera humorous due to its incongruence with the material that surrounds it, but also due to its internal subversions of the genre of Italian tragic opera.[26] The nature of the parody also brings the 'person' of Verdi into the frame. The stock 'romantic' tropes of the 'Pyramus and Thisby' story result in a critique of the narratives and dramatic aims of the Italian tradition as well as musical ones. Here, the 'popular' cultural associations of Verdi's music are retained and brought to the fore when the allusions are embedded in a new context.

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[22] *Ibid.*, p. 56.
[23] Imogen Holst, *The Music of Gustav Holst and Holst's Music Reconsidered*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1986, p. 55.
[24] Esti Sheinberg, *Irony, Satire, Parody and the Grotesque in the Music of Shostakovich: A Theory of Musical Incongruities*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2000, p. 142.
[25] Hermann Danuser, 'The Textualisation of the Context: Comic Strategies in Meta-Operas of the Eighteenth and Twentieth Centuries', *Music and the Aesthetics of Modernity*, ed. Karol Berger and Anthony Newcomb, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2005, p. 69.
[26] Edmund J. Goehring, *Three Modes of Perception in Mozart: The Philosophical, Pastoral and Comic in Così fan tutte*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 233.

In addition, Britten blurs the lines of authorship. By having the characters of the opera 'invent' their own rendering of the text, he casts them as fictive authors, adding another layer of self-reflexivity.[27] The presence of the wedding 'audience' on-stage is also crucial to the comedy, as multiple onstage audiences add 'ironic perspective'.[28] Moreover, Britten directs our attention to the meta-opera as song by changing 'words' to 'song' in the libretto during the Prologue; although he did not draw attention to this small but telling alteration:

> We stuck faithfully to Shakespeare's words, actually adding only one line: "compelling thee to marry with Demetrius'. We worked from many texts, but principally from facsimiles of the First Folio and the First Quarto.[29]

In context then, humorous incongruity and self-consciousness is present at various levels. On a large scale, the whole play is incongruous in relation to the surrounding comedy due to its 'burlesqued' Italian allusions, including references to an 'actual' work: Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*. On a smaller scale, Britten plays with particular generic elements of Italian opera through repetition, divergence from norms, exaggeration and structural distortion. These larger-than-life transformations mean that the original musical signifiers of tragedy are turned on their heads.

The form of the meta-play is shown in the table below [Fig. 7.1]:

Fig. 7.1

263	Choral Prologue Mechanicals 'If we offend'	*Tempo ordinario*	D major
267	Recitative Athenians Theseus: 'These fellows do not stand on points'		F major

[27] Hermann Danuser, 'The Textualisation of the Context', p. 74.
[28] Klaus van den Berg, 'Die Meistersinger as Comedy: The Performative and Social Significance of Genre', *Wagner's Meistersinger: Performance, History, Representation*, ed. Nicholas Vassonyi, Rochester, University of Rochester Press, 2003, p. 158.
[29] Benjamin Britten, 'A New Britten Opera' (1960), *Britten on Music*, p. 187.

268	Prologo continued Quince: 'Gentles, perchance you wonder at this show'		E*b* major
270	Recitative Athenians Helena: 'I wonder if the Lion be to speak'		
271	Prologo continued Wall: 'In this same interlude, it doth be fall'	*Lento lamentoso*	A*b* major
272	Recitative Athenians Hermia: 'Would you desire lime and hair to sing better?'		
273	Scena ed aria Bottom/Pyramus: 'O grim look'd night'	*Moderato me tenebroso*	F major
275	Recitative Theseus: 'The wall methinks being sensible, should curse again'		
276	Duetto Pyramus and Thisby 'O wall, full often hast thou heard my moans'	*Allegretto grazioso – Allegro brillante*	E*b* major – C major
280	Recitative Wall: 'Thus have I wall my part discharged'	*Lento lamentoso*	Ab major
281	Recitative Hippolyta: 'This is the silliest stuff that ever I heard'		
281	Arioso Lion: 'You ladies you'	*Quasi polka*	F major
283	Recitative Hermia: 'A very gentle beast'		
283	Recitative Moon: 'This lanthorn doth the horned moon present'	*Andante placido*	C major
286	Recitative Athenians: 'But silence; here comes Thisby'		
286	Scena Thisby and Lion 'This is only Ninny's tomb'	*Allegretto – Presto feroce*	E*b* major – G major

288	Aria (da capo) Pyramus: 'Sweet Moon, I thank thee for thy sunny beams'	*Lento*	D*b* major
292	Recitative Demetrius: 'With the help of a surgeon he might yet recover'		C major
293	Aria with cabaletta Thisby: 'Asleep my love? What, dead, my dove?'	*Allegretto*	E*b* major – C major – B major
295	Recitative Theseus: 'Moonshine and Lion are left to bury the dead'		
297	Bergomask	*Quick*	D major

Within the scene, the interjections of the Athenian audience alternate with the 'numbers' of the opera. These 'numbers' are parodies of Italian nineteenth-century forms, except Pyramus' *da capo* aria, which resonates not only with the Italianate, but also with Purcellian examples. The key scheme is also predictable, with characters linked with tonal areas and affective moves underlined by exaggerated key symbolism. Some of these are comic in their extreme affects: for example the clichéd move to D*b* for Pyramus' death aria, and the extreme and incongruous movement from E*b* major to B major in Thisby's death aria. The tempo designations are all written in Italian, for example *tempo ordinario*, as opposed to the English used in the remainder of the score, as a wink of fun to the performers.

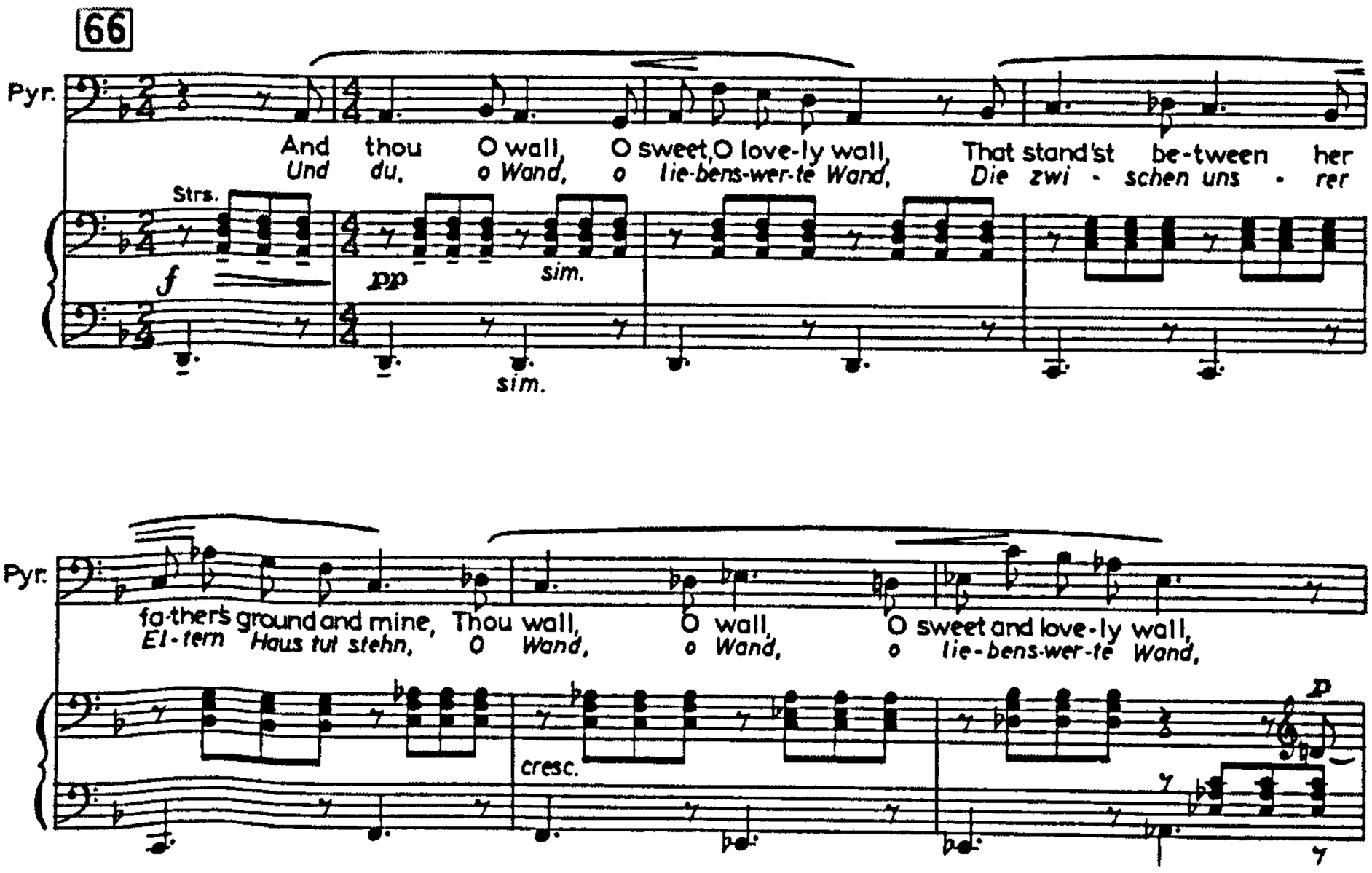
The prologue plays with ritualised homophonic utterance: the passage is repeated to static pitches and the punctuation of the text goes against the metric pulse and bar lines, to accentuate the lack of erudition of the Mechanicals. It also includes rising sequences that are cut off unexpectedly and without resolution; an example of Britten's playful subversion of expectation. It is linked with textual humour, too, as Lysander fittingly observes: 'They have rid their prologue like a rough colt: they know not the stop'.[30]

[30] *Ibid.*, p. 267.

There follows an assortment of exaggerated character vignettes. The Wall's part is characterised by *Sprechstimme* and a comic high A on the word 'chink',[31] emphasising the double-entendre, which is repeated in the recitative. Pyramus' entrance is the focus of amusement as he speaks with a heavy voice – suggesting that he reads from the script as in rehearsals.[32] Moreover, he inappropriately invokes the solemnity of cursing and ritualistic utterance in Verdi. Another example of Britten's playful use of operatic utterance is the Moon's entrance, where he is accompanied by cliché *pp* high strings and, after an interruption, he rushes his lines, leading to a series of hysterical high Ds with *f/p* alternations. In addition, during the duet for Thisby and the Lion, he/she sings in *falsetto* while the Lion cries 'Oh! Oh!'[33] with coloratura complexity – decidedly more human than animal.

Pyramus's subsequent *cavatina* is supported by a quintessential Verdian accompaniment [Fig. 7.2].

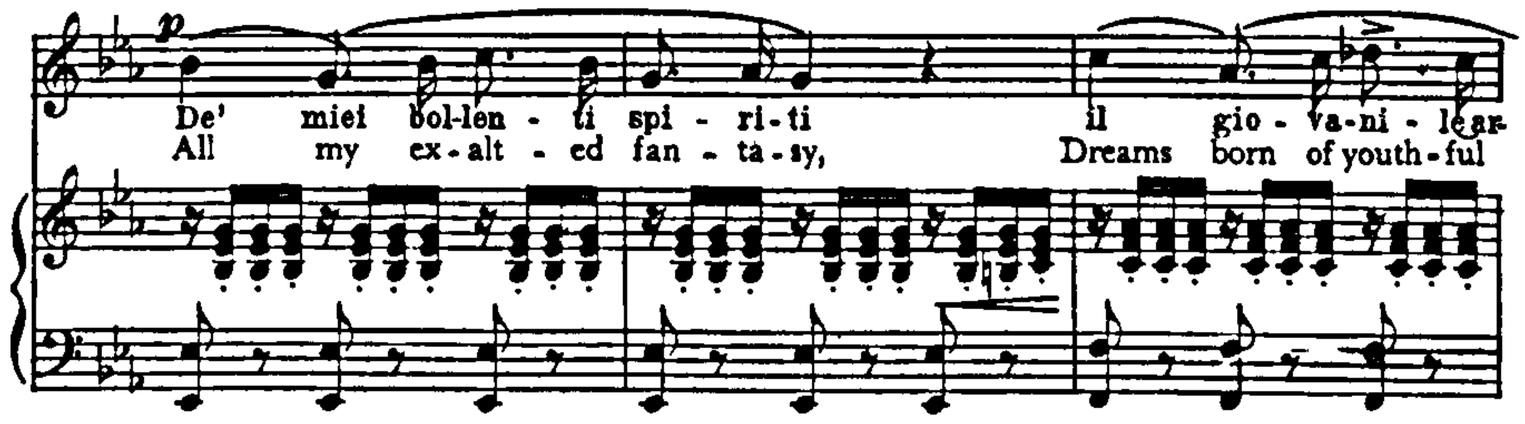
Fig. 7.2 Comic allusion to Verdian accompaniment patterns, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Act III, p. 274.



[31] *Ibid.*, p. 280.
[32] *Ibid.*, p. 273.
[33] *Ibid.*, p. 287.

An example of a similar accompanimental pattern occurs in *La traviata*, as Alfredo sings his air, yearning for Violetta in act II No. 7: *'De' miei bollenti spiriti'* ('All my exalted fantasy')[34] [Fig. 7.3].

Fig. 7.3 Accompaniment to Alfredo's 'air', *La traviata*, act II no. 7, p. 71.



(Donizetti also frequently employs these figurations; for example, in *Roberto Devereux* the *larghetto* for Roberto in the final act has a similar accompaniment, but at twice the tempo and in 4/4 time.)[35] Pyramus' *cavatina* is extremely short, consisting of a five-phrase verse based on repetitions – as we have seen in Fig 7.2 – of one motivic pattern characterised by a rising 6th (which reaches a comically ambitious high E*b* in the final stages). At the close of this section there is a sudden movement to *f con espansione* and a *ff* orchestral ascent as he peers through the wall. This marks a change to recitative for a *scena* 'tempo di mezzo'.

Thisby's and Pyramus' following duet is comic, too. Once again the accompaniment alludes to the set patterns of Italian opera, this time consisting of flowing 6/8 quavers, with an orchestral phrase introducing the vocal line.[36] When Thisby enters *timidamente* she begins a four-phrase verse, which consists of an ascending sequence structured: a a' a" a'". While Verdi frequently employs such patterns, this imitation becomes comic due to its exaggerated insistence. Moreover, the slight rhythmic 'stretch' in the third section nods teasingly towards Verdi's typical a a' b a" arrangement. Pyramus' first reply is fragmented, and the change to 9/8 suggests his musical imbalance, his stumbling diction exaggerated by the angular and repetitive nature of his line. At the *allegro brillante* the 'lovers' sing together in 4/4. Thisby uses just one motif repeated in sequence and inversion. Pyramus' line consists

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[34] Giuseppe Verdi, *La traviata*, p. 71.
[35] Gaetano Donizetti, *Roberto Devereux*, Roma, Ricordi, 1837, p. 136.
[36] Benjamin Britten, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, p. 277.

of ascending and descending scales. In this case the humour is derived from excessive simplification, leading to predictability. Britten simultaneously isolates quintessential Verdian gestures and empties them of their original 'meaning' through repetition. The duet ends with *scena*, as they make their tryst to meet at Ninny's tomb. Pyramus sings on a solemn repeated G, while Thisby, still repeating her motive, now in a descending pattern (exaggerating the 'tearful' sign of sorrow), stretches from high G to low E*b*.

The final two set arias for Pyramus and Thisby parody the Italian death aria. Pyramus' *da capo aria* is particularly melodramatic, with many musical clichés of doom, like timpani rolls and a highly-charged *allegro disperato* section. The main humour, however, is derived from the structure: Pyramus kills himself at the end of the B section, meaning that the resurgence of the A section occurs *after* his death. This speech from beyond the grave plays with popular conceptions of Verdi's lengthy final act death scenes: the set-piece is taken out of context and subverted. Yet, it also highlights the intrinsic artificiality of the operatic genre, including the artifice of Britten's own work. Thisby's set-piece is equally humorous due to the floridity of her *vivace* coloratura on the word 'dead', something that would usually be composed in a dolorous manner.

As well as alluding to general clichés, the scene also makes specific reference to *Lucia di Lammermoor*. Thisby's aria begins in E*b*, the key of Lucia's mad scene – a reason perhaps for her hysterical repetitions of 'death'. Moreover, in Donizetti's opera, too, there is a movement to B major at the close, for Edgar's death. The similar tonal trajectory in Thisby's aria may therefore be viewed as a comic condensation of the denouement of Donizetti's tragedy. Lucia's coloratura patterns, too, resonate with Thisby's utterance. As in the 'threnody' of *Albert Herring*, this calls into question the 'sincerity' of musical utterance, as comedy proves a sharp critique of opera itself. Yet, the clear intertextuality means that the 'criticism' becomes far more pronounced.

However, the line between this Italianate parody and the surrounding material is not always clear cut. Not only does Britten allude to Verdian comic utterance, but the Italianate is subtly present in the serious moments of the surrounding drama: the *parola scenica* of 'I swear to thee' in Lysander and Hermia's duet in act I (with repetitions of the phrase added by Britten in the libretto) and the *bel canto* lyricism of

Oberon's aria 'On the bank where the wild thyme grows' (act I). Thus, techniques used in the wider opera are subverted in the sub-section of the very same work. This daring tension displays Britten's critique of his own operatic processes. Cooke, too, notes the self-reflexivity of the play's structure:

> "Pyramus and Thisbe" is distinguished by the structural clarity prevalent elsewhere in the work: recurrent passages for Wall and Flute serve as primitive *ritornelli* in the manner of Britten's designations for Acts I and II, and the entire performance is framed by two statements of a fanfare. Thus Britten's opera-within-the-opera parodies not only the Italianate conventions it so elegantly ridicules, but also the techniques Britten himself employs in the structuring of the work as a whole.[37]

This leaves an uncomfortable tension between humour and seriousness, as parody – suggesting critical rejection here – co-exists with transformed allusion and even deep Italianate 'assimilation'.

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, then, Britten uses his allusions to Italian models highly self-consciously, and the associations between the dramatic conventions of Italian tragedy and the story of Pyramus and Thisby heighten the work's comic potency. Thus, in this work Britten gets close to 'deflating' the importance of his Italian models, to rebelling against them. Nevertheless, some ambiguities remain: what Britten saw as a joke and what he took seriously is never completely clear. As some Verdian elements are 'assimilated' in the opera, parody as ridicule and parody as playful homage appear still to co-exist, and in the context of his wider oeuvre, by mocking Italianate tragedy he is simultaneously mocking himself. It is perhaps this capacity for self-parody that makes this tragi-comedy so colourful.

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[37] Mervyn Cooke, 'Britten and Shakespeare: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*', *Cambridge Companion to Benjamin Britten*, p. 143.

Chapter VIII

Britten's 'Opera in Ecclesiastical Costume'[1]?
The *War Requiem* and Verdi's *Requiem*

Writing about the first performance of the *War Requiem* in 1962 for *The Sunday Times*, Desmond Shawe-Taylor observed:

> Verdian influence can be traced clearly in the musical idiom, but [it is] so well assimilated that its effect is purely beneficial. We feel it as the soprano turns from the minor to the relative major key in her noble 'Liber scriptus ... Rex tremendae', we feel it in her sobbing, dipping and soaring line in the 'Lacrimosa' (so exquisitely integrated with the tenor's 'Move him into the sun' far below on the fields of France), in the softly climbing choral entries at 'Recordare Jesu Pie' and in the sharply punctuated G minor chords of the 'Tuba mirum'. The trumpet fanfares that introduce this section, later turned to such eloquent account, are perhaps a distant echo, not of Verdi's tremendous summoning of the cohorts of the dead, but rather of the startling arrival of the ambassadors in the third act of *Otello*.[2]

Shawe-Taylor not only identifies a multiplicity of allusions to Verdi's *Requiem* in Britten's *War Requiem*, but also the work's central generic ambiguity: the tension between 'sacred' and 'secular' utterance. Indeed, this musical duality is enhanced by textual duality, as Britten alternates the liturgy of the Requiem Mass with the poetry of Wilfred Owen. Moreover, Shawe-Taylor's identification of its operatic resonance recalls Hans von Bülow's provocative assertion in *Allgemeine Zeitung* that Verdi's *Requiem* was his latest '*Oper im Kirchengewande*' ('opera in ecclesiastical costume').[3] To understand the *War Requiem* in 'operatic' terms is to take things too far. But the *War Requiem*, as does Verdi's *Requiem*, effectively exploits the frictions arising from the coexistence of 'non-operatic' and 'operatic' gestures. Furthermore, Shawe-Taylor

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[1] Hans von Bülow, 'Musikalisches aus Italien', *Allgemeine Zeitung*, 24 May 1974, quoted in: David Rosen, *Verdi: Requiem*, Cambridge Music Handbooks, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 12.
[2] Desmond Shawe-Taylor, 'Britten's Requiem', *The Sunday Times*, 9 December 1962.
[3] Hans von Bülow, 'Musikalisches aus Italien'.

appears to feel the need to 'defend' Britten against the potentially negative implications of references to his predecessor and, interestingly, he uses Britten's description – 'assimilation'[4] – to justify the presence of the Italian idiom.

The aim here is to explore the various overt and covert ways in which Britten alludes to, transforms and even subverts the musical language of Verdi's *Requiem* in the *War Requiem*. Furthermore, consideration of 'secular' references in 'sacred' moments, as well as 'sacred' references in 'secular' moments may serve to highlight the ways in which Britten and Verdi blur and challenge generic boundaries. It is through recognition of this complex network of, at times antagonistic, relationships between 'sacred' and 'secular', 'non-operatic' and 'operatic' elements that we may also usefully consider the pacifist message of the *War Requiem*.

1. Britten, Verdi's *Requiem* and the critics

In an interview with Donald Mitchell in 1969, Britten spoke openly, and a little defensively, of references to Verdi's *Requiem* in the *War Requiem*: 'Many people have pointed out the similarities between the Verdi *Requiem* and bits of my own *War Requiem*, and they may be there. If I have not absorbed that, that's too bad. But that's because I'm not a good enough composer, it's not because I'm wrong.'[5] This suggests that for Britten knowledge of Verdi's work, as well as requiems by other composers, was part of the creative process, even if he wished these influences to meld into his own musical 'voice'. Malcolm Boyd's study of the similarity between the works, one of the most detailed considerations of Britten alongside Verdi to date, will be referred to in the subsequent discussion.[6]

That Britten turned to the Verdi *Requiem* when writing his own *War Requiem* is perhaps natural, given his enthusiastic early reception of a performance of the piece in Vienna in 1934, where he immediately bought a copy of the full score. Britten's edition is highly annotated, suggesting extensive subsequent study. After the performance he wrote glowingly to Grace Williams: 'Grace – you must admit that this is great stuff – I

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[4] Benjamin Britten, 'Speech to the International Arts Guild' (1944), *Britten on Music*, p. 45.
[5] Benjamin Britten, 'Mapreading' (1969), *Britten on Music*, p. 329.
[6] Malcolm Boyd, 'Britten, Verdi and the Requiem', *Tempo*, No. 86, 1968, pp. 2-6.

don't expect you to accept early Verdi – but the Requiem, Otello, & this, you must like – especially when done as it was last night – it was *thrilling*.'[7] Furthermore, Pears sang the work in concert.[8] We may presume that Britten knew of and heard these performances and even the rehearsals that preceded them. Moreover, Pears wrote disparagingly to Britten in 1938 about a radio performance of the work: 'I hope you enjoyed Toscanini [conducting Verdi's *Requiem*]. I listened to some, but our set went bad on us. The soloists sounded rather a mixed lot. Roswaenge too Wagnerian? Thorborg a bit flat? Soprano shrill and bass not heavy enough?'[9] Britten's detailed knowledge of Verdi's *Requiem*, as both score and performance, is thus not in doubt.

In addition, as Fig. 8.1 shows, Britten and Pears owned an extensive collection of other requiem scores, including those by Mozart, Schubert and Berlioz. (The columns of the table represent: (1) composer and work; (2) owner of score, inscription and annotations; and (3) year of publication.) As we shall see, these works also appear to have informed Britten's approach to the *War Requiem*.

Fig. 8.1 Britten's and Pears's requiem scores.

Hector Berlioz *Grande messe des morts*	BB 'Benjamin Britten '36'	1900
Johannes Brahms	PP	1910
Deutsches Requiem	BB 'No. 53 / E. B. Britten / Xmas 1927 / from his mother & father'	n.d.
Frederic Delius *Requiem*		1952
Antonin Dvořák *Requiem*	PP	n.d.
Gabriel Fauré *Requiem*	PP with annotations	1900
Wolfgang Amadeus	BB	n.d.

[7] Letter to Grace Williams from Vienna on 8 November 1934. Benjamin Britten, *Letters from a Life*, Vol. I, p. 354.
[8] Pears's performances of the Verdi *Requiem* – or parts of it – include a Mozart-Verdi programme from Glyndebourne (1946), featuring Elisabeth Abercrombie, Catherine Lawson, Urbach and Peter Pears as soloists accompanied by Jani Strasser, in which they sang the *Offertorium* from the Verdi *Requiem*.
[9] Letter from Pears to Britten, dated June 1938. Benjamin Britten, *Letters from a Life*, Vol. I, p. 559.

Mozart *Requiem*	PP with annotations	
Ildebrando Pizzetti *Sinfonia in la*	Gift of Nippon Kindai Ongakuka	1940
Priaulx Rainier *Requiem*	Aldeburgh Festival premiere in 1956 PP with annotations	1956
Franz Schubert *Deutsches Requiem*		1928
Giuseppe Verdi *Requiem*	JC Accompanied by three programmes for performances of Verdi's *Requiem* in which Joan Cross was a soloist	n.d.
	BB 'Benjamin Britten. Wien, Nov. 1934'	n.d.

Britten's fascination with the genre is further suggested by his consideration of other requiem settings, including *Sinfonia da Requiem* (1940), as well as two uncompleted projects: a *Mea Culpa* after Hiroshima (1945) and a *Requiem* dedicated to Ghandi (1948).[10] These project ideas, like the *War Requiem* itself, are strongly political.

When writing the *War Requiem*, Britten was acutely aware of the context of the work's intended first performance in Coventry Cathedral. He observed:

> [T]he best music to listen to in a great Gothic church is the polyphony which was written for it, and was calculated for its resonance: this was my approach in the *War Requiem* – I calculated it for a big, reverberant acoustic and that is where it sounds best. I believe … in *occasional music* … almost every piece I have ever written has been composed with a certain occasion in mind, and usually for definite performers, and certainly always *human* ones. [11]

Indeed, Britten used overtly sacred 'polyphony' to suit the occasion of the performance. The suggestion that the work's 'religiosity' was central to Britten's conception of the piece is substantiated by resonances between the *War Requiem* and his earlier sacred works, including *Te Deum in C* (1934) and *Missa Brevis in D* (1959), as discussed

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[10] Humphrey Carpenter, *Benjamin Britten*, p. 405; Benjamin Britten, *Letters from a Life*, Vol. III, p. 405.
[11] Benjamin Britten, 'On Receiving the First Aspen Award' (1964), *Britten on Music*, pp. 256-257.

below. His emphasis on 'human', societal considerations is notable, too, in relation to the work's pacifist aims.

A variety of critics, in addition to Shawe-Taylor, have highlighted the Italianate nature of the work,[12] although any link between Verdi's *Requiem* and the *War Requiem* has been coloured by consideration, and frequently suspicion, of the 'popular' implications of these allusions: Kennedy, for example, refers to their 'conventionality'.[13] (Notably, similar claims of 'insincerity' characterised the reception of Verdi's work, predominantly due the work's perceived 'operatic' references, raising questions about it religiosity.)[14] Moreover, Cooke asserts that 'allusions to Verdi are exclusively to be found in the Latin sections with full orchestra.'[15] As a result, the choral writing has been considered less 'sincere' than the harsh 'truths' contained in the more personal Owen settings. The reading of the work's pacifist message has reinforced this polarisation. Yet, as we shall see, the opposition between the 'grand' Verdian gestures and private chamber interjections is challenged by Italianate inflections in both the choral sections *and* the tenor and baritone solos. Britten alludes to Verdi both in the ritual of the Mass and in the sections that he uses to subvert it.

The balance of 'sacred' and 'secular' elements in the *War Requiem* has preoccupied discussion of the work. As with Verdi's *Requiem* 'operatic' gestures as well as 'sacred' ones have been identified.[16] Shawe-Taylor, for example, wrote in *The Sunday Times* on 3 June 1962:

> The highly personal and recognisable language he has forged for himself over the years is made up, for all its subtlety, of traditional procedures and devices: of insistently communicative melody, harmonies whose point and pull can be felt at once notwithstanding their strangeness, and an emotional commitment that is rare and unmistakable – going from the heart to the heart in Beethoven's words ... *All these qualities at their highest point, deployed on a scale far larger than is usual for him outside opera, are to be found in the War Requiem.*[17]

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[12] Colin Mason, 'Britten's Anti-War Requiem', *Manchester Guardian Weekly*, 7 June 1962.
[13] Michael Kennedy, *Britten*, p. 214; Humphrey Carpenter, *Benjamin Britten: A Biography*, p. 411.
[14] David Rosen, 'The Premiere, subsequent performance history, and performing practices', *Verdi: Requiem*, p. 91.
[15] Mervyn Cooke, *Britten: War Requiem*, Cambridge Music Handbooks, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 53.
[16] David Rosen, 'A Question of Genre', *Verdi: Requiem*, pp. 89-97.
[17] My Italics. Desmond Shawe-Taylor, 'From the Heart to the Heart', *The Sunday Times*, 3 June 1962.

Cooke also suggests that it was the dramatic potential of the requiem genre that contributed to Britten's enthusiasm for the project.[18] Indeed, conversely, it was after the performance of the *Sinfonia da Requiem*, a precedent for the *War Requiem*, that Britten was offered financial support for his first full-scale operatic work, *Peter Grimes*:[19] the dramatic appears to lie extremely close to the sacred in much of Britten's oeuvre. The *Church Parables* and *Noye's Fludde* are both sacred *and* dramatic and many of his songs allude to sacred themes, for example the *Canticles* and *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne*. The Christian iconography that infuses his operas, including *Billy Budd*, confirms Britten's flexible approach to generic distinction, as does the 'parable' tone of works such as *Paul Bunyan*. (However, the extent to which sacred musical allusions in these operatic settings may be understood as knowingly theatrical, a *representation* of the sacred rather than 'truly' sacred, is an intriguing one.)[20] In the *War Requiem* the notion of 'troping' outlined by Rupprecht also contributes to the blurring of generic boundaries.[21] We may thus identify a constantly shifting balance between the dramatic and sacred in Britten's works, creating a sliding scale from opera to church music, with the *War Requiem* placed between the *Church Parables* and the *Canticles*: Opera – *Church Parables* – *War Requiem* – *Canticles* – vocal music with sacred themes – church music.

Thus, in addition to identifying moments in which Britten alludes to the Verdi *Requiem* itself, it is fruitful to consider the work's quasi-theatrical resonance. This is not to suggest that the *War Requiem* may be read in straightforwardly 'operatic' terms: it has no clear plot, fixed characters or tragic/comic trajectory, but it does contain allusions to what may broadly be termed 'dramatic' or 'operatic' gestures: passionate soliloquies (*arias*), operatic set-pieces, narrative rhetorical signifiers and even 'number' structures. These glimpses of the 'operatic' constantly challenge and question generic distinction, creating another layer of drama. Moreover, highlighting the dramatic serves to highlight Britten's *suppression* of the dramatic, an equally effective quality of the work.

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[18] Mervyn Cooke, *Britten: War Requiem*, p. 49.
[19] Benjamin Britten, *Britten on Music*, p. 174.
[20] Ralph P. Locke, 'The Religious Works', *The Cambridge Companion to Berlioz*, ed. Peter Bloom, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 97.
[21] Philip Rupprecht, *Britten's Musical Language*, p. 192.

2. Large-scale structure

As Appendix VIII shows, there are many structural parallels between the *War Requiem* and Verdi's *Requiem* which go beyond the correspondences intrinsic to a setting of the same text. (In the chart, the *War Requiem* is represented on the right, and the Verdi *Requiem* on the left. The columns indicate: (1) section, sub-section and text; (2) page number in the Novello piano reduction;[22] (3) tempo; (4) tonality; and (5) ensemble, musical description and in the *War Requiem* an indication of the performing group – either soloists and chamber orchestra 1, chorus and full orchestra 2 or boys' chorus and organ 3.) The Italian terms attributed to the structure of Verdi's *Requiem* follow the precedent of Rosen's analysis.[23] These terms, although frequently used in an operatic context, are not intended to suggest that the *Requiem* may be considered an operatic work, but rather offer a useful and relevant way of describing formal structures.

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[22] Giuseppe Verdi, *Requiem*, ed. Michael Pilkington, London, Novello, 1993.
[23] David Rosen, *Verdi: Requiem*.

In the *Requiem Aeternam*, both Britten and Verdi choose a ternary setting of 'requiem aeternam' followed by a choral setting of the 'kyrie eleison'. The 'requiem aeternam', in A B A' form, consists of: a *parlante* chorus, a choral contrasting section ('te decet hymnus') and a recapitulation of the *parlante* chorus, all in a minor key (D and A respectively). This is followed in both cases by a choral setting of the 'kyrie eleison' in major tonality: an unaccompanied hymn-like chorale in the *War Requiem* and an unaccompanied *concertato* in the *Requiem*. In the *War Requiem* a setting of 'Anthem for doomed youth' acts as an interpolation between the two main sections, marked by a contrasting key – B*b* minor in the prevailing D minor – and an abrupt tempo transition to *allegro* from the preceding *lento*.

The *Dies irae* begins with an apocalyptic passage for chorus in G minor in both the *War Requiem* and the *Requiem*. Britten follows this with a setting of 'Bugles sang' as a bass solo, while Verdi follows it by setting 'Mors stupebit' as a bass *scena*, an example of Verdi's choice of forces influencing Britten's own. This is leads to an *aria con pertichini* for soprano solo in both the Britten and the Verdi. Verdi also adds a shortened recapitulation of the 'Dies irae', a *terzetto* and *concertato* here. Britten follows this with 'The next war' for tenor and baritone. The two settings align again at a recapitulation of the G minor 'Dies irae'. In the *War Requiem* this leads to a soprano and chorus section and a varied repetition of the 'kyrie eleison' to conclude the *Requiem aeternam*. In the *Requiem* a *largo concertato* ends the movement. Notably, the tempo oscillation – *allegro* for the 'Dies irae' and *lento* for the ending – appears in both.

The *Offertorium* is constructed in A B A' form by Britten and a palindromic I II III II' I' form by Verdi. Britten's B section, itself a ternary form, consists of a setting of 'Parable of the old man and the young'. Both Britten and Verdi integrate fugal and quasi-fugal elements into the choral outer parts.

The *Sanctus* settings differ significantly, however. Verdi constructs the movement as a strict *fuga doppia*, while Britten moves between soprano and chorus sections, ending with a solo for baritone called (aptly) 'The end'.

The *Agnus dei* is constructed in both cases by increasingly elaborate repetitions of a simple melody three times before a coda. In the *War Requiem*, however, this is

effectively layered with a tenor solo setting of Owen's 'At Calvary near the Ancre' in A B A' form. Britten thus fuses strophic and ternary forms through layering.

The *Libera me* in the *War Requiem* begins with a *parlante* chorus, paralleling the emphatic solo soprano *parlante* in Verdi. Britten follows this with a choral passage (quasi-*tempo d'attacco*) before a soprano aria, as does Verdi. A recapitulation of the 'dies irae' from the *Dies irae* movement follows in both works. 'Libera me' then returns, though this is divided into sub-sections by Verdi: a soprano *recitativo*, *coro fuga*, *tempo d'attacco*, *preghiera* and *coro*. Britten concludes the movement with a setting of 'Strange meeting' for tenor and baritone, layered with the chorus and boys' chorus, leading to the third and final repetition of the hymn-like 'kyrie eleison'.

The sectional divisions in both the *War Requiem* and the *Requiem* are strongly articulated, often involving clear changes of key, tempo and ensemble. This is exaggerated by Britten's use of three contrasting performing groups: tenor and baritone soloists with chamber orchestra, chorus with full orchestra, and boys' choir with organ. These groupings suggest spatial placement, movement and confrontation – a nod in the direction of the 'dramatic', perhaps. Moreover, three planes of diction are immediately established: the personal, demotic tone of the tenor/baritone 'soldiers', the ritualistic, ceremonial tone of the chorus, and the ethereal, celestial tone of the boys' choir.

However, Britten frequently blurs the boundaries between sections by overlapping one section with another. (Such layering is marked by # in the diagram.) He simultaneously exaggerates structural divisions and creates 'fade' effects. Further, the large-scale planning of the *War Requiem* means that the three performing groups are only heard together at the climax of the *Libera me*, as a rhetorical device contributing to a sense of closure. (As we shall see, however, the return at the very end of the movement to the 'kyrie eleison' material undermines the comforting effect of this apparent 'synthesis'.) Material from one section is also frequently incorporated into another (recalling Verdian '*unità musicale*'[24]), even crossing the sacred/secular divide: for example, the brass fanfares of the *Dies irae* that infuse (mimetically) the embedded

[24] David Rosen, *Verdi: Requiem*, p. 80.

Owen setting 'When bugles sang'. Thus, Verdian 'number requiem' techniques are enriched by 'art of transition'.

3. *Requiem aeternam*: *parlante*, sacred/secular choruses and a 'hidden' aria form

In a rehearsal for the first recording of the *War Requiem* in 1963, Britten instructed the singers: 'In the first movement, please, keep your words and the rhythm clear, but don't sing out. No emotion, no expression: it's a slow *procession*'.[25] The suggestion of dispassionate utterance recalls the religious, 'processional' opening scenes that occur in his dramatic works, for example the plainchant in *Curlew River* and the hymn in *Noye's Fludde*,[26] implying virtual 'stage-craft'.

The 'processional' atmosphere is reinforced by the chorus who enter *parlante*, repeating single pitches over the peals of chilling tritone bells [Fig. 8.2a]. The 'dispassion' of the setting is scarcely allayed by the orchestral interjections that punctuate the choral textures. We may expect that this apparent resistance to Romantic 'voluptuousness' would distance Britten's setting from Verdi's. But the *Requiem*, too, opens with *parlante* choral repetitions where the melody is carried by the orchestra rather than the vocal line [Fig. 8.2b]. Whereas Verdi's orchestral theme overlaps with the voices, creating an atmosphere of solemn supplication, however, Britten's setting alternates disquietingly between choral stasis and orchestral movement, producing an effect of almost sinister dispassion.

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[25] Benjamin Britten, quoted in: John Culshaw 'Britten and the War Requiem', *The Gramophone*, May 1963.
[26] Philip Rupprecht, *Britten's Musical Language*, p. 194.

Fig. 8.2a The opening of Britten's *Requiem aeternam*, p. 1.

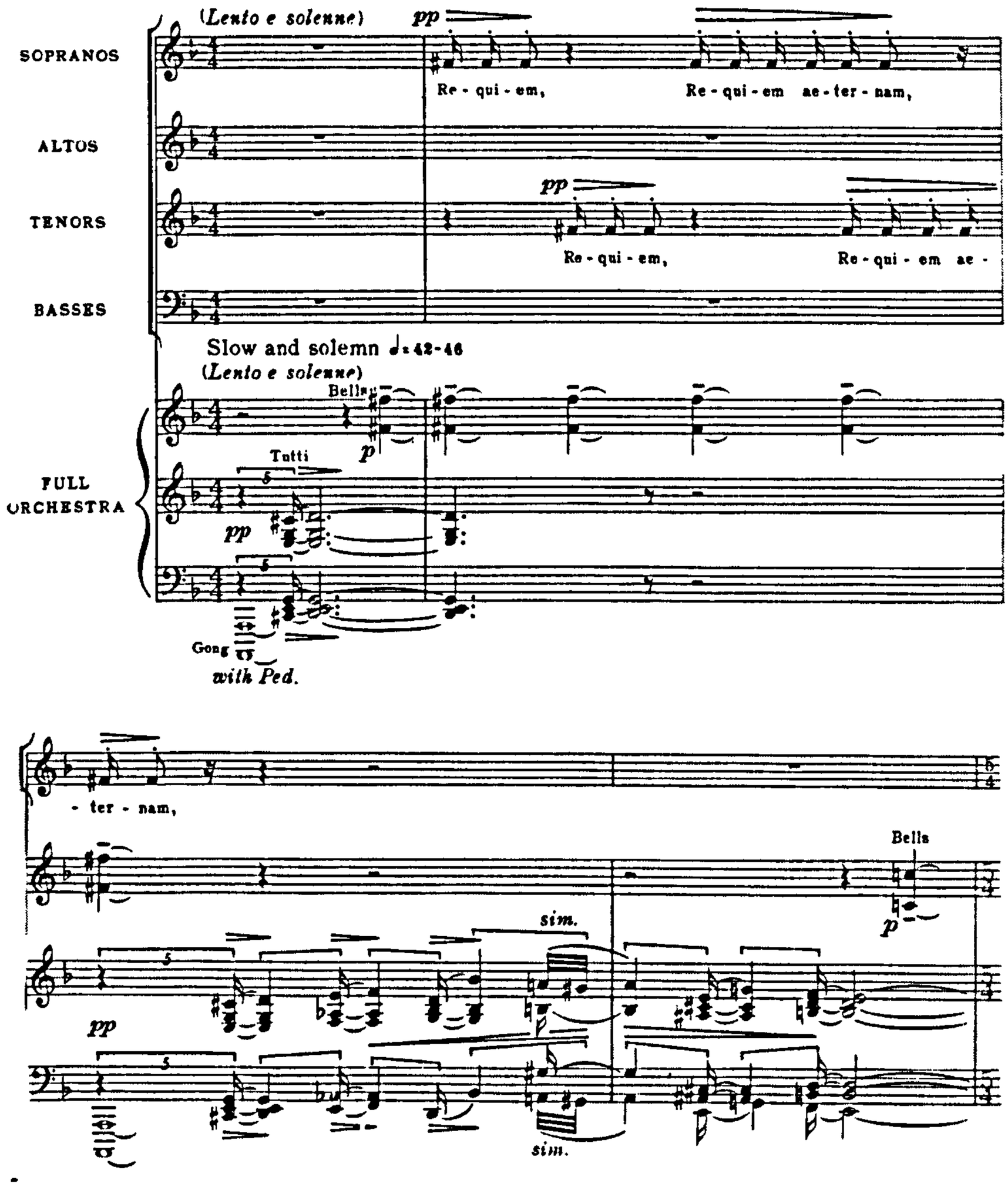
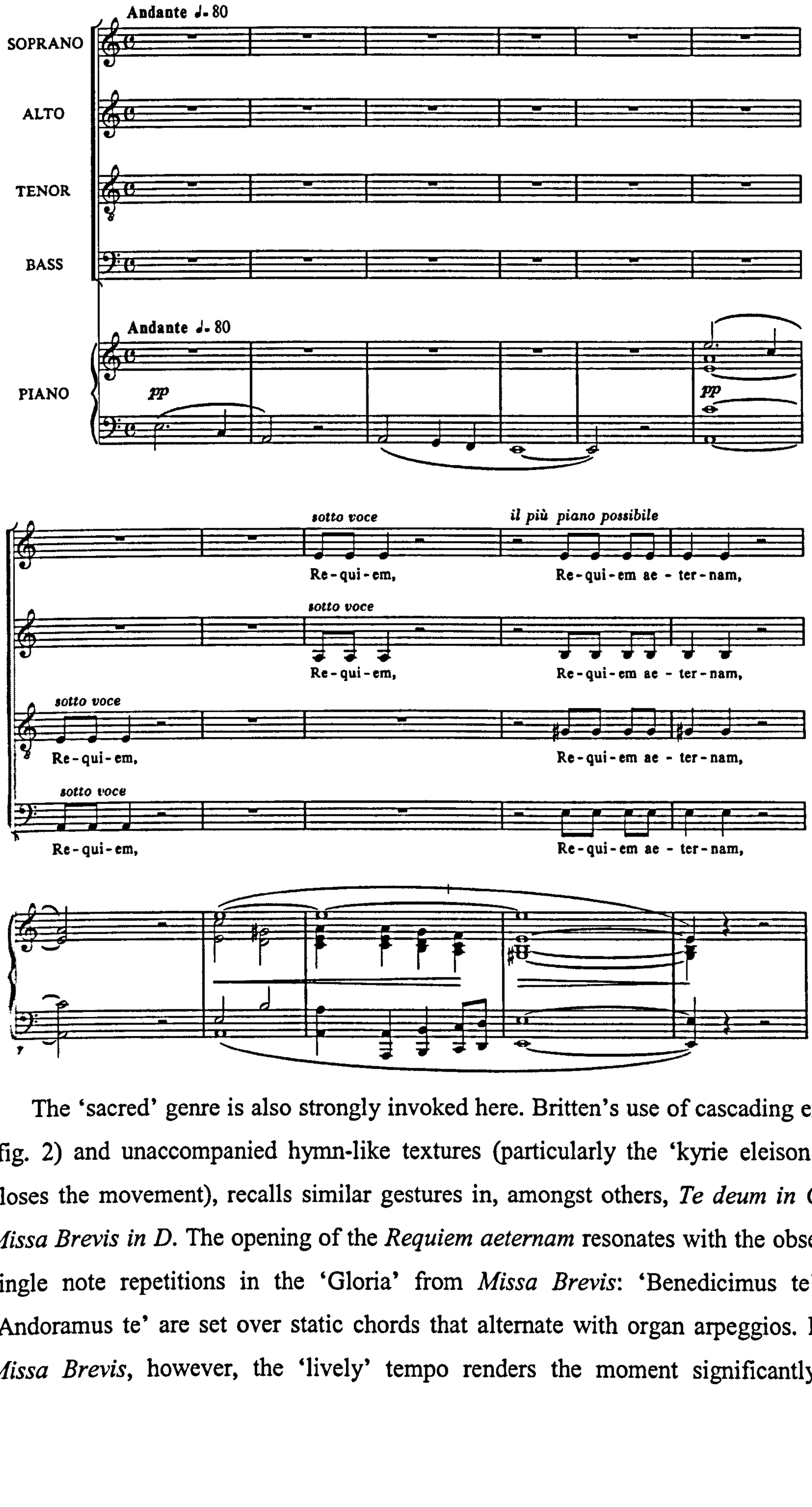


Fig. 8.2b The opening of Verdi's *Requiem aeternam*, p. 1.



The 'sacred' genre is also strongly invoked here. Britten's use of cascading entries (fig. 2) and unaccompanied hymn-like textures (particularly the 'kyrie eleison' that closes the movement), recalls similar gestures in, amongst others, *Te deum in C* and *Missa Brevis in D*. The opening of the *Requiem aeternam* resonates with the obsessive single note repetitions in the 'Gloria' from *Missa Brevis*: 'Benedicimus te' and 'Andoramus te' are set over static chords that alternate with organ arpeggios. In the *Missa Brevis*, however, the 'lively' tempo renders the moment significantly less

chilling. Moreover, the staggered entries that characterise the *Requiem aeternam* opening are foreshadowed by the layered entries in the 'kyrie', as well as the ending of the 'Agnus Dei', again from *Missa Brevis*. (Similarly, the hymn-like texture of the 'kyrie eleison' at the close of the *Requiem aeternam* alludes to the 'kyrie eleison' from the 'kyrie' of the same work.) Verdi's use of the chorus also finds resonance with his other sacred compositions, including *Quattro Pezzi Sacri*.[27] Importantly, Britten admired this work as we have seen, in particular its harmonic invention.[28]

Moreover, in their settings of 'Te decet hymnus', both Britten and Verdi appear to emphasise (even exaggerate?) the sacred. As Rosen notes, considering the latter: 'The *a cappella* scoring, imitation and severe melodic material – all evoking the *stile antico* – again serve to distance Verdi's *Requiem* from the profane world of opera: Verdi makes the point early on.'[29] We may say the same for Britten's use of the boys' chorus and organ, with its plainsong inflections over sustained organ pedal notes, although this association is tempered by frequent references to twelve-tone collections, rather than modal harmony. It is as though both Verdi and Britten write music, here, that refers self-consciously to the sacred, to defend their works from the 'intrusion' of the dramatic.

However, this 'sacred' atmosphere is again challenged. Verdi's unaccompanied setting of the 'kyrie eleison' involves a *concertato* texture. Although the text is identical in each line, the textural layering with the sweeping soprano line suggests, contrary to Rosen's view,[30] unaccompanied operatic *concertati* such as that found in act II scene i of *Luisa Miller*. Britten, too, alludes to *concertati*, but in these sections – for example the 'Liber scriptus' – the chorus act homophonically, while the soprano arches over the texture in a typically Verdian manner. Once again signs of the sacred and the secular converge.

When the tenor interjects with 'Anthem for doomed youth' in the *War Requiem* the utterance is not only sharply, even cruelly, ironic but the accompaniment shifts to that

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[27] Roberta Montemorra Marvin, 'Verdi's Non-operatic Works', *The Cambridge Companion to Verdi*, pp. 169-184.
[28] Benjamin Britten, 'Verdi – A Symposium' (1951), *Britten on Music*, p. 112.
[29] David Rosen, *Verdi: Requiem*, p. 19.
[30] *Ibid.*, p. 20.

of a sparse chamber orchestra – as always when Owen's poems are sung (fig. 9). Away from the 'grand' mass we are immersed in personal experience of the brutalities of war, heightened by its juxtaposition with the (mock?) comfort of the boys' choir, which acts as a symbol of (dis)passionate sacred consolation. In relation to the realism and poignancy of Owen's verse, the preceding songs of the 'angelic' choir ('Te decet hymnus') begin to ring hollow. The effect is intensified by the coldness of their measured twelve-tone utterance. We may imagine that allusions to Verdi would recede, here, to be replaced by Britten's 'private' language of compassion. Indeed, the contrast with the preceding material is striking. The demotic and subtly nuanced diction of the solo – laced with the uncanny sonority of the tritone, symbolising, as Whittall has argued, the simultaneous presence of conflict and peace[31] - and the sparseness of the chamber writing seem eerily distant from the ritual of the Mass.

The tenor's vocal utterance is itself full of sharp contradictions. At the opening of the section, set in an ominous D*b* major, a jaunty orchestral theme below tense *tremolo* chords, is answered by a smoothly rising vocal phrase ('What passing bells for those who die as cattle'),[32] with a lingering *tenuto* on 'as'. However, the tenor's *tenuto* climax coincides with a sharply disruptive *sf* falling glissando in the harp, precipitating a biting *sf* downward leap on the word 'cattle'. This constitutes the 'A' section of the four-part structure. A similar contrast between yearning sweetness and startling bitterness characterises section A'. Section B consists of a contrasting passage in F major, characterised by an *animato* tempo indication and much note repetition. Moreover, given the textural references to 'holy glimmers of goodbyes'[33] it is tempting to read the 'plainsong' inflections, here, as an ironic and self-conscious criticism of the preceding boys' chorus. For the 'boys' of the battlefield, contemplation of divine mystery is replaced by very human terror. The final, coda-like C section consists of a rhythmically augmented version of the preceding melodic material and recalls, unsettlingly, the twelve-tone inflections of the boys' chorus.

Yet, not only does the tenor's melody refer to the rising contour of Verdi's *concertato* [Figs. 8.3a and 8.3b], but also to the Verdian melodic arch described by

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[31] Arnold Whittall, 'Tonal Instability in Britten's *War Requiem*', *Music Review*, No. 24, 1963, pp. 201-204.
[32] Benjamin Britten, *War Requiem*, p. 14.
[33] *Ibid.*, p. 17.

Dallapiccola.[34] The climax, characteristically two thirds of the way through the solo, appears at a high A*b*, in the phrase 'but in their eyes shall shine the holy glimmers of goodbyes':[35] a harsh reminder, by means of irony, of the 'un-holiness' of war. Moreover, despite the 'narrative' third person position of the text, there is a strong sense of personal involvement here; of a passionate observer – Owen himself? – reacting to *common* experience. This merging of personal experience with retrospective criticism collapses the distance between the implied narrator and the war victims. It is thus particularly apt that the structure of the setting refers to the lyric prototype typical of Verdi's operatic *aria* forms: A A' B C. (A similar tenor *aria* occurs in Verdi's *Requiem* in the *Dies irae*.) Although shrouded in a sparse mimetic accompaniment, melodic angularity, and tritonal relations, the tenor part alludes to operatic 'lyric' utterance. Britten creates a window for personal expression, as an alternative to Verdi's 'voluptuousness', an interruption to the inevitability of the religious rite, in a way that recalls similar interruptions of the dramatic trajectory in opera.

Fig. 8.3a The opening of Britten's 'Anthem for Doomed Youth', pp. 13-14.

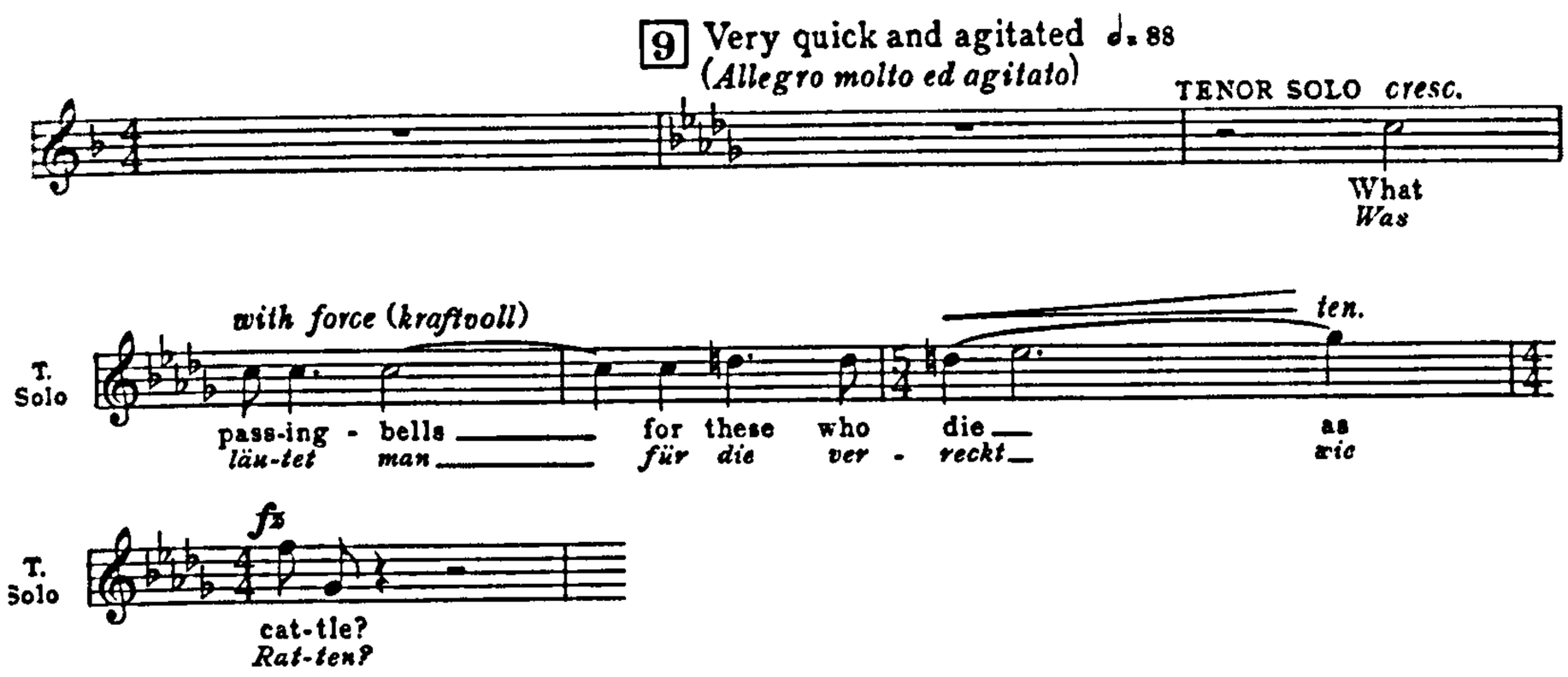
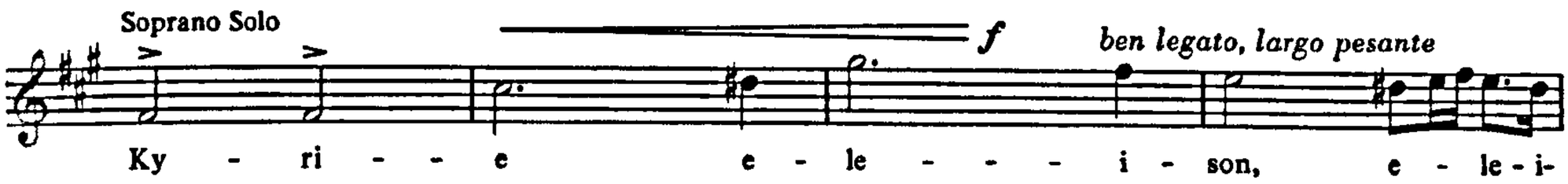


Fig. 8.3b Verdi's *concertato* melody, p. 9.



[34] Luigi Dallapiccola, 'Words and Music in 19th-century Italian Opera', pp. 133-163.
[35] Benjamin Britten, *War Requiem*, p. 17.

4. *Dies irae*: 'terror topoi', *aria con pertichini* form

Britten's *Dies irae* opens with a striking trumpet fanfare, leading to a climax ablaze with apocalyptic force.[36] Here the association with Verdi is particularly close, as both settings are characterised by a multiplicity of musical 'signs' of judgement: minor tonality, dramatic rests, biting dotted rhythms, chromatic lines and anapaestic 'death' rhythms; the Verdian 'terror' topoi described by Rosen [Fig. 8.4a and 8.4b].[37] The brass fanfares that introduce Britten's *Dies irae*, answered by *pp* triplets and held chords, suggest at once an assertive 'call to battle', or more aptly 'judgement', and the suspense of waiting. At the entrance of the chorus, whispering 'Dies irae, dies illa',[38] the tension mounts, the suppressed utterance, here, foreshadowing the gradual building of intensity that explodes at fig. 21.

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[36] Malcolm Boyd notes: 'It is in the Dies Irae that Britten's inspiration runs closest to Verdi's. This is hardly surprising, perhaps, since the Dies Irae, more than any other part of the Requiem Mass, is likely to appeal to a composer with a feeling for what is descriptively and dramatically effective.' Malcolm Boyd, 'Britten, Verdi and the Requiem', p. 3.
[37] David Rosen, *Verdi: Requiem*, p. 26.
[38] Benjamin Britten, *War Requiem*, p. 20.

Fig. 8.4a The opening of Britten's *Dies irae*, p. 20.

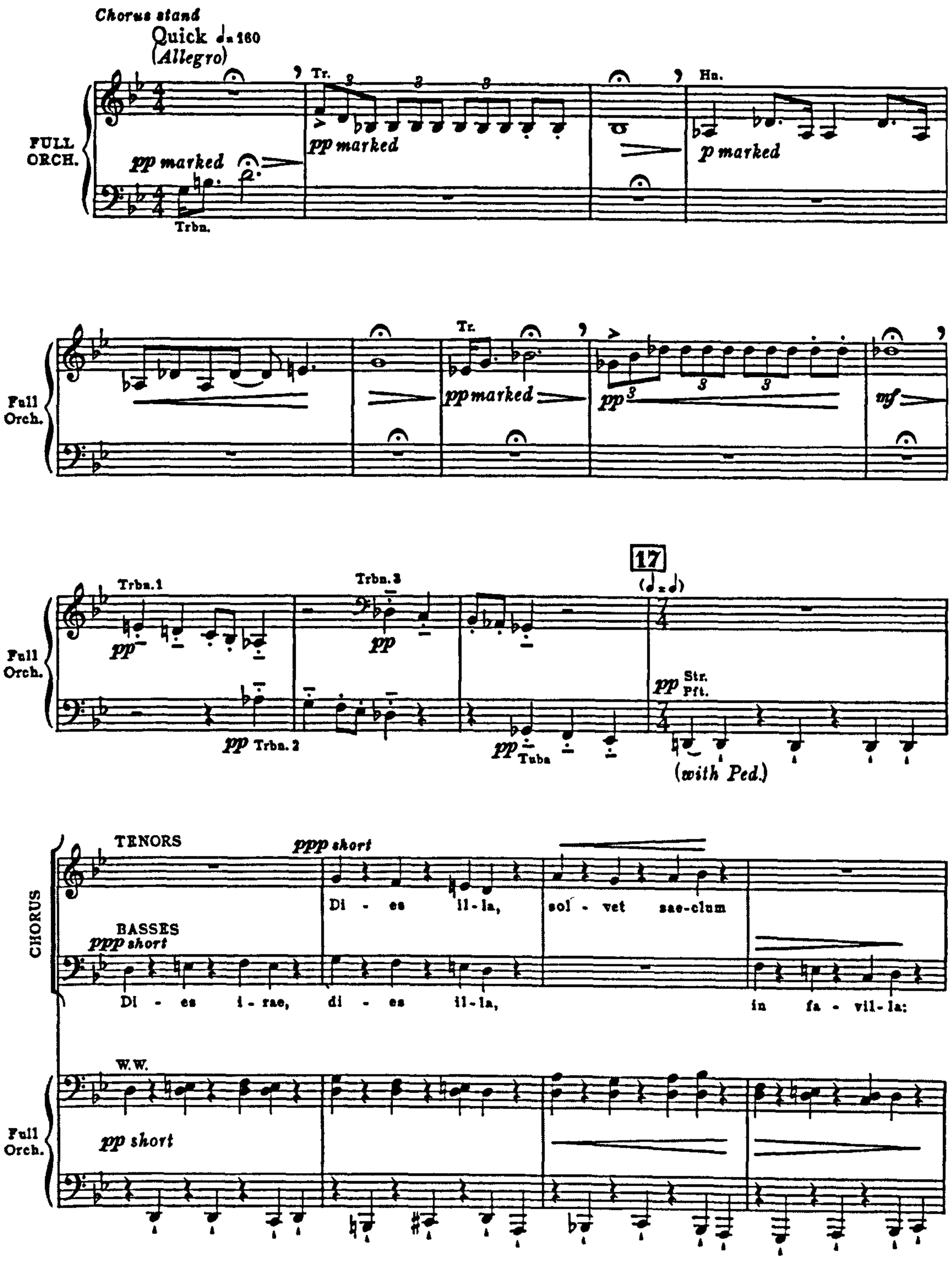
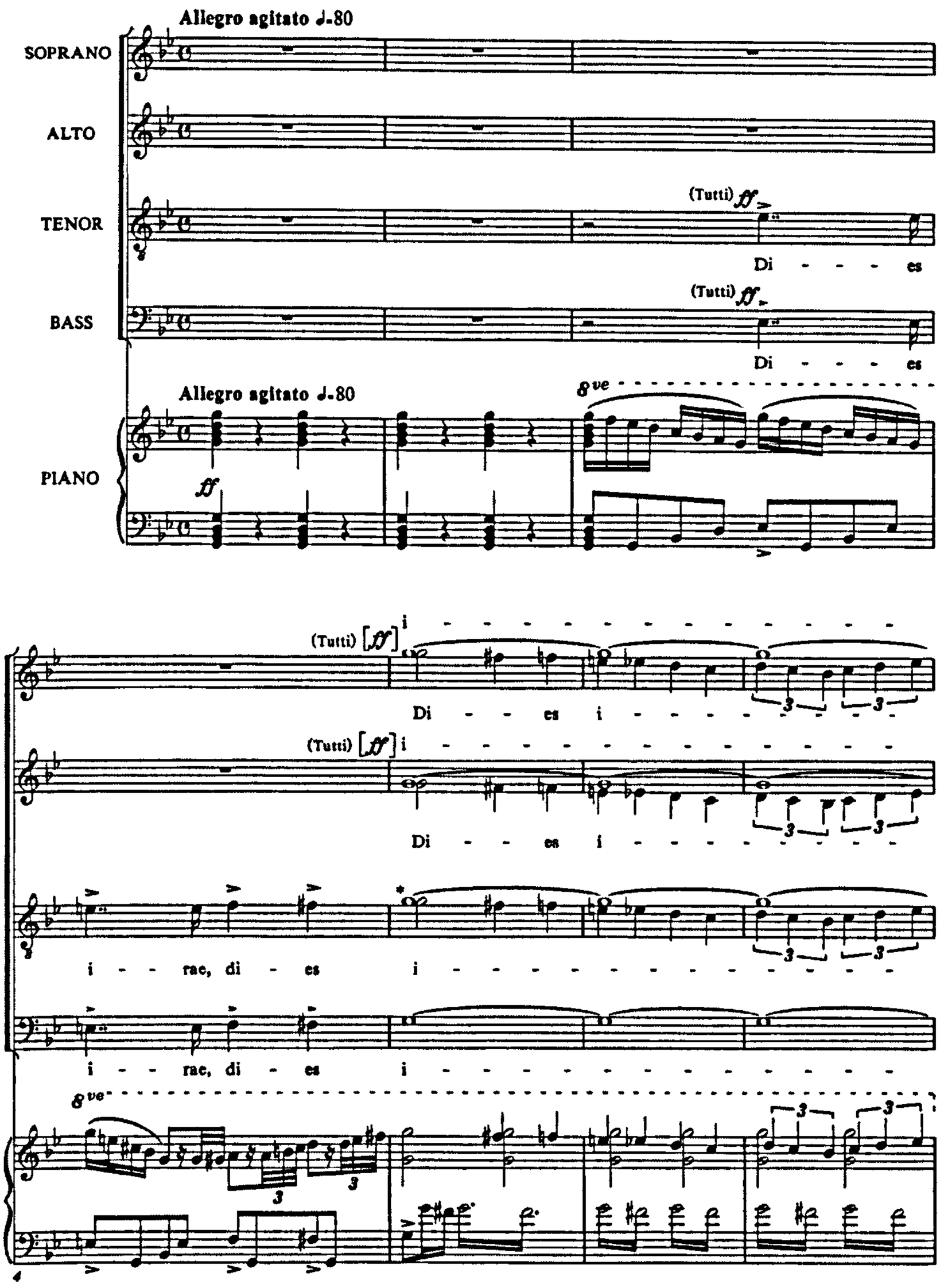
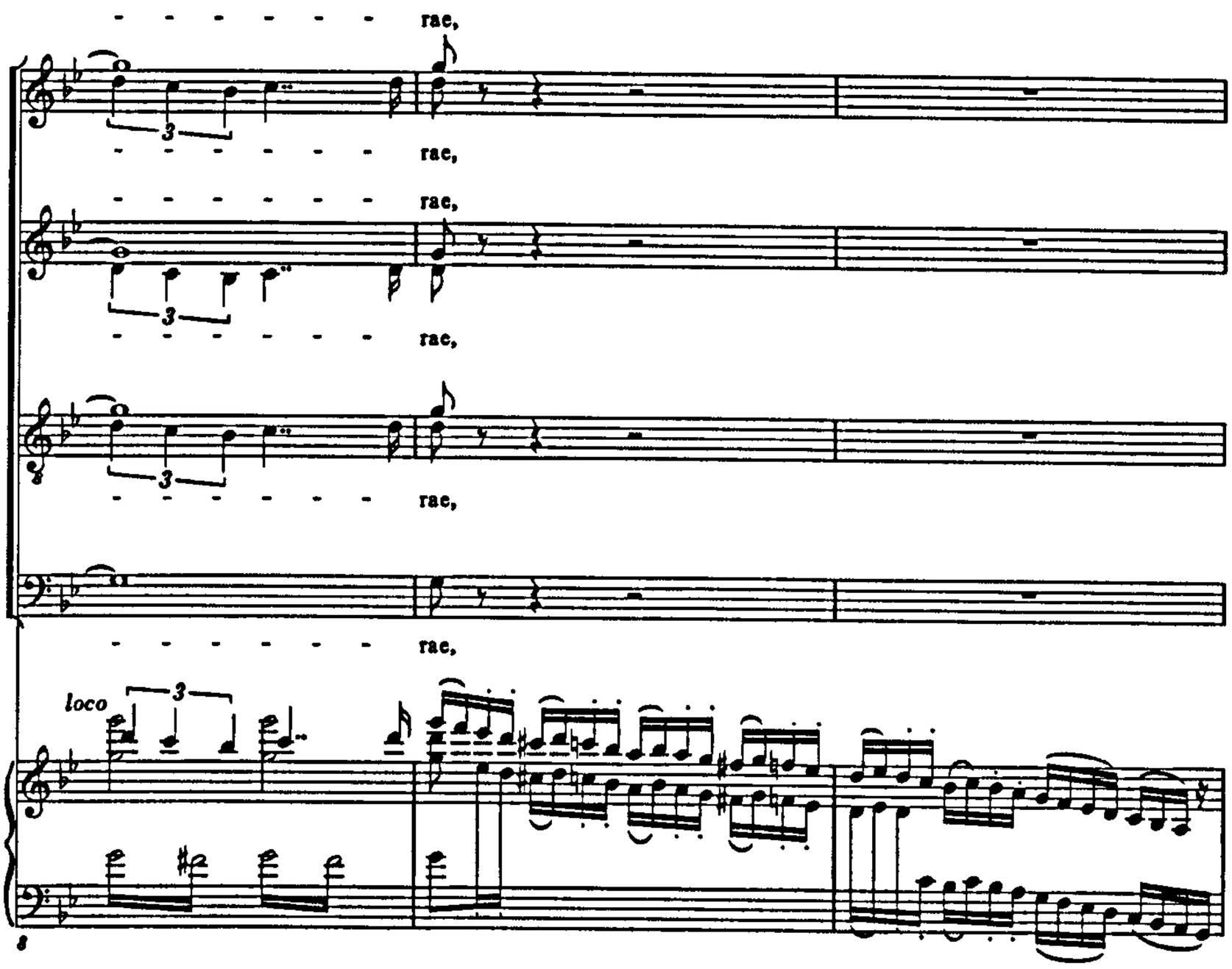


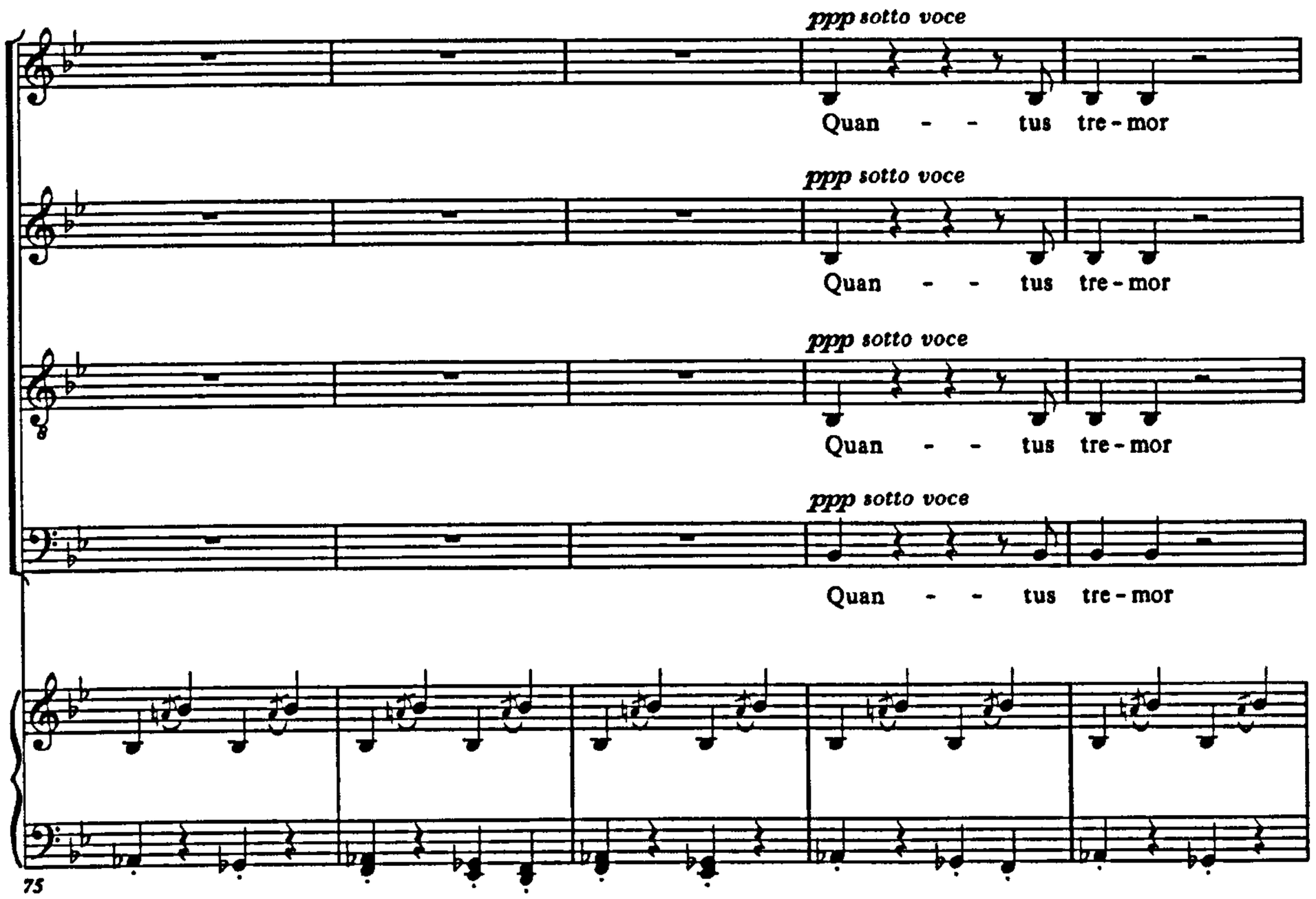
Fig. 8.4b The opening of Verdi's *Dies irae*, pp. 22-23.

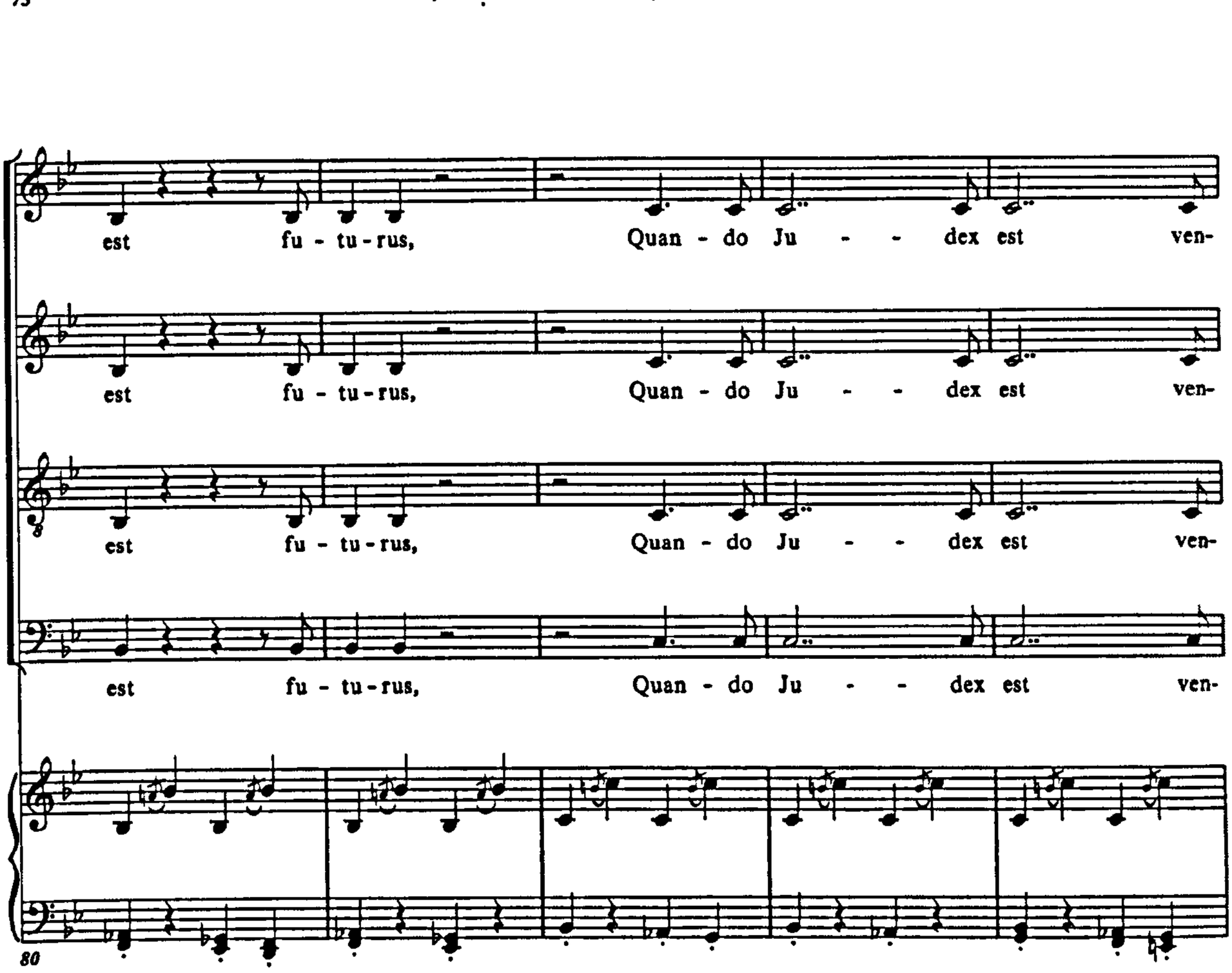


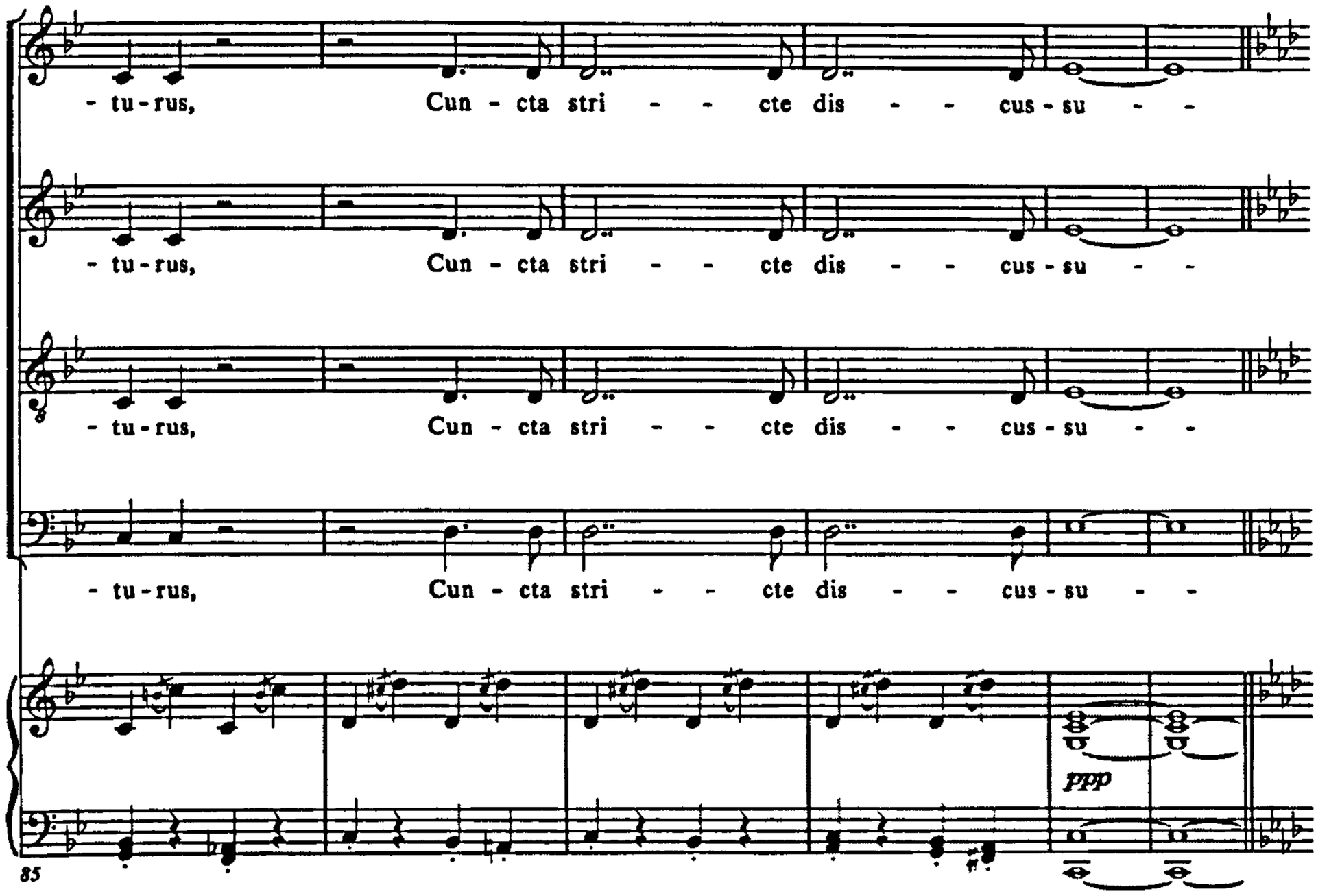


The appearance of these rhetorical signs of 'terror' in both the *War Requiem* and the *Requiem* are evocative of highly-charged moments in Verdi's operatic oeuvre, in particular storm scenes – for example the opening of *Otello* and the end of *Rigoletto* – and trial scenes – for example the consecration scene in *Aïda*. As we have seen, such operatic scene-setting is equally apparent in Britten's oeuvre, for example the storm in *Peter Grimes* and the trial in *Billy Budd*. Verdi's allusion to the dramatic is intensified by a typical ritual three-fold ascent from E*b* minor, to F minor, to G minor [Fig. 8.5], and the *recitativo* opening that recalls Zaccaria's aria in act I of *Nabucco* [Fig. 8.6]. Moreover, the spatially separated trumpet calls, which emerge at fig. 20 of the *War Requiem*, recall Verdi's use of off-stage trumpets in ritual scenes. The 'dramatic' associations are particularly apt as a result of the textual references to super-natural judgement and 'human' ritual in the liturgical text. Moreover, in the *War Requiem* these trumpet figurations filter into the chamber textures of 'When bugles sang'; another example of the integration of the dramatic into the chamber context.

Fig. 8.5 The ritual ascent through E*b*, F and G minor in Verdi's *Dies irae*, pp. 31-32.






- tu - rus, Cun - cta stri - - cte dis - - cus - su - -
- tu - rus, Cun - cta stri - - cte dis - - cus - su - -
- tu - rus, Cun - cta stri - - cte dis - - cus - su - -
- tu - rus, Cun - cta stri - - cte dis - - cus - su - -
ppp
85

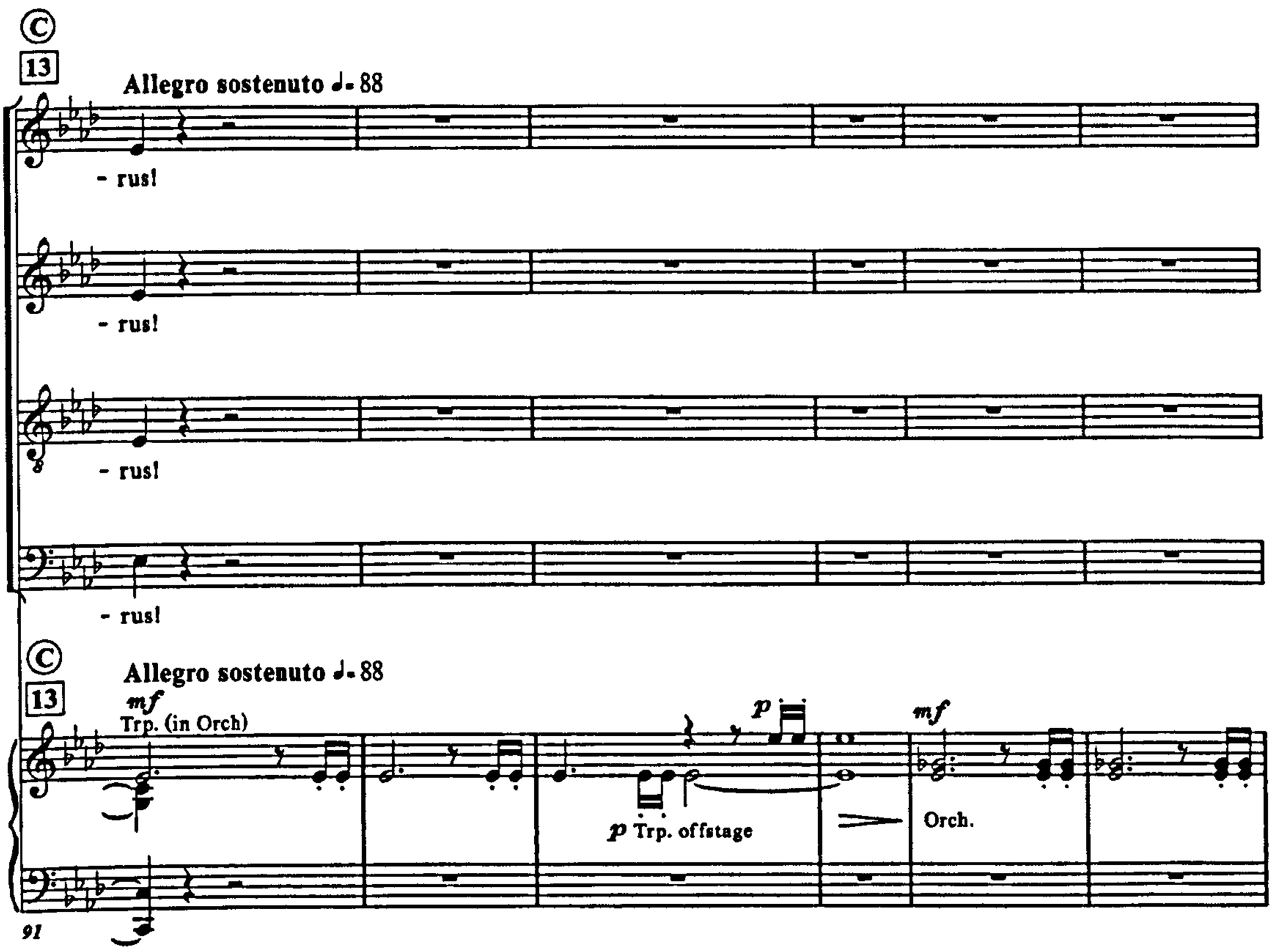
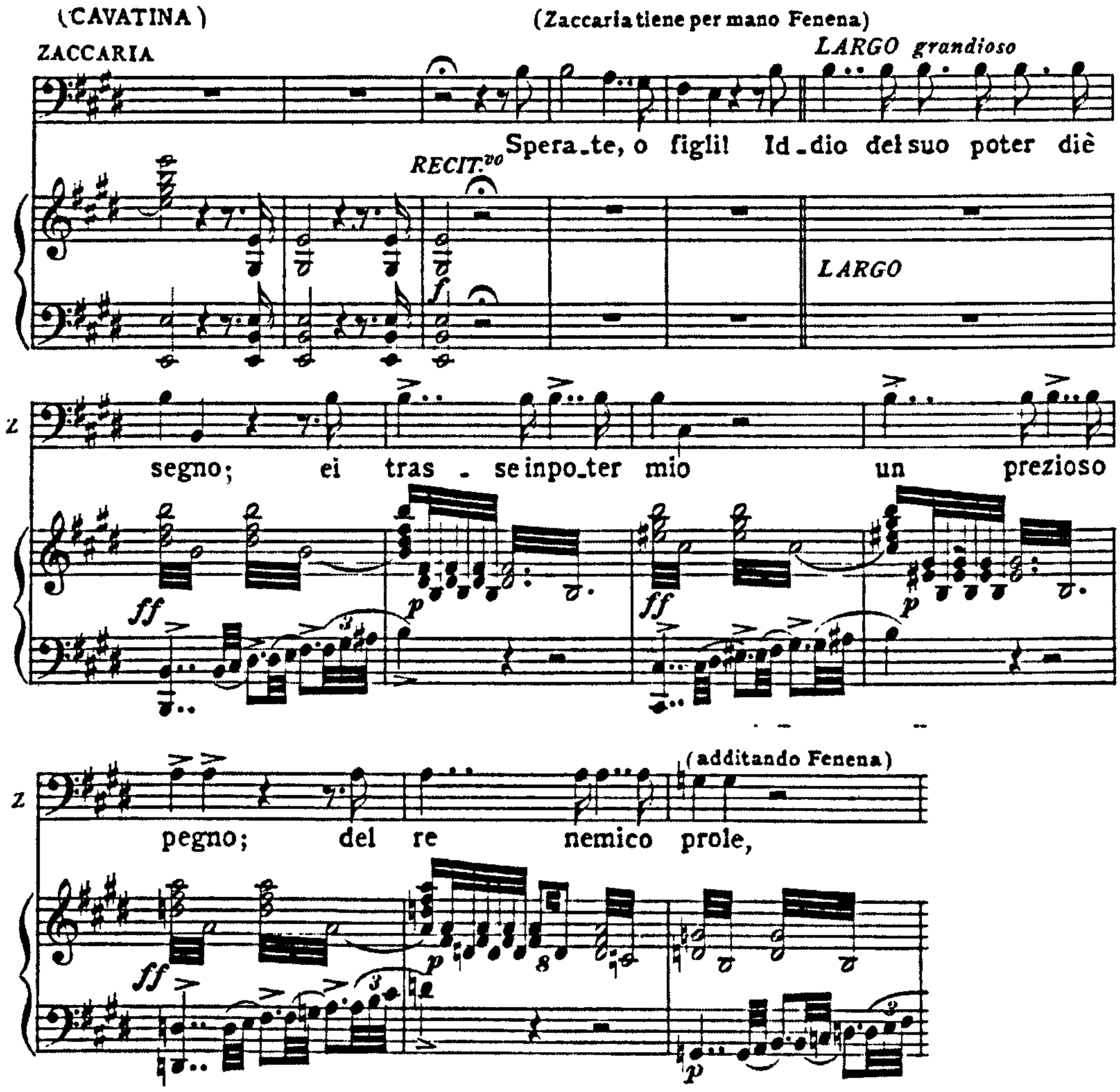
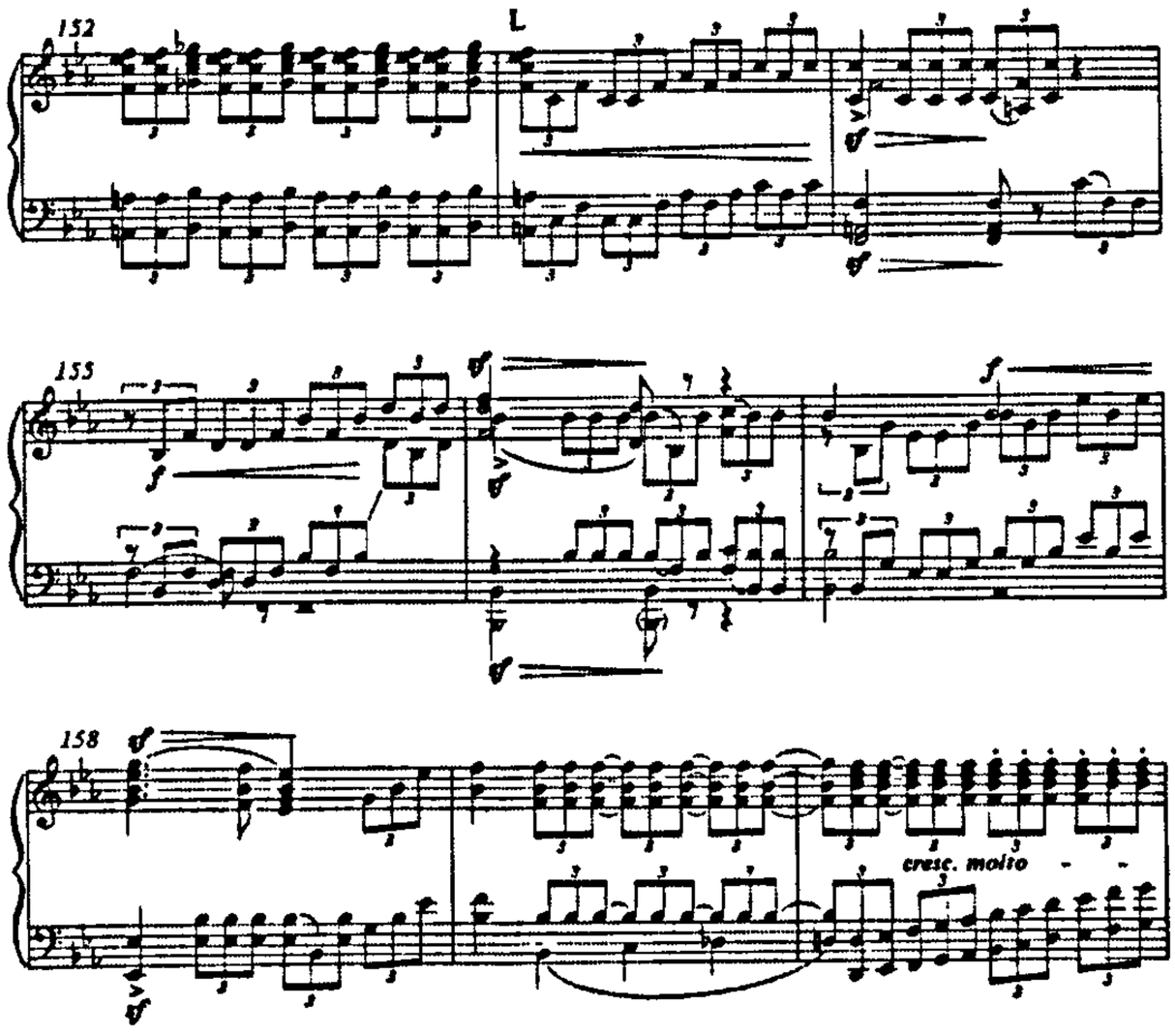

13
Allegro sostenuto ♩= 88
- rus!
- rus!
- rus!
- rus!
13
Allegro sostenuto ♩= 88
mf
Trp. (in Orch)
p
mf
p Trp. offstage
Orch.
91

Fig. 8.6 The ritual opening of Zaccaria's aria in act I of Verdi's *Nabucco*



However, the meaning of these tempestuous gestures is multifaceted. The movement also draws on the tradition of trumpet orchestration in the *Dies irae* and *tuba mirum*, displayed in the works of Mozart, Cherubini and especially Berlioz, who uses trumpets antiphonally [Fig. 8.7]. The aggressive intensity of these descriptions of judgement is thus at once sacred and dramatic.

Fig. 8.7 Berlioz's antiphonal trumpets in the 'Tuba mirum' from the *Grande Messe des Morts*



In keeping with this fraught intensity, the 'Liber scriptus' for solo soprano in the *War Requiem* as well as the *Requiem*, conveys the personal implications of impending judgement, the private face of fear. For the final verse beginning 'Quid sum miser', the text shifts to the first person. In the *War Requiem* this is underlined as the soprano crosses the rhetorical divide between the ritualised chorus and the personal tone of the 'soldiers', once again adopting lyric utterance. In Britten's as in Verdi's setting, this section consists of an *aria con pertichini* (*aria* with choral interjections).

The opening passage of Verdi's 'Liber scriptus' aria for mezzo-soprano outlines the lyric prototype A A' B C. Phrase A (starting at fig. 17) begins with note repetitions on A, leading to an upward leap of a fifth. Phrase A' follows, consisting of a repetition of the same gesture after a foreboding, death-laden semiquaver gesture from the timpani. This makes way for phrase B, a highly-charged *f* descending line with sharply dotted rhythms and a 'regal', commanding tone ('Unde mundus'). Phrase C integrates more daring leaps and elaborates the dotted figures from the preceding phrase, finally reaching a highly nuanced cadence resting uneasily on a pause.

The mezzo-soprano soliloquy is then interjected by sinister, hushed homophonic chorus repetitions of 'Dies irae', marked *con voce cupa e tristissima, estremamente*

piano. She answers this with a passionate descending line 'Judex ergo cum sedebit'[39] spanning an octave F#-F# and ending with note repetitions, marked *ff*, but quickly diminishing to *p*. The repetitions here, recalling 'curse' scenes in Verdi's operas, suggest that *she* is adopting the numinous power that she heralds. This extreme contrast recalls the affective volatility of arias for female characters in Verdi, which frequently emphasise the oscillation between feminine anger and fragility. The climax of the aria is reached with a repetition of 'Liber scriptus'[40] first on B*b*, then D and then F leading to the highest note – A*b* – marked *ff*. Once again this is followed by a hushed 'Dies irae'[41] from the chorus and 'incantatory' repetitions from the soloist on low D. These repetitions are disrupted by rests – a sign of anxiousness – before a surprising *fff* outcry, outlining a sharply descending line. Verdi sets the final verse of the text, 'Quid sum miser', as a separate movement, after a repetition of the forceful *Dies irae* as a reflective *adagio terzetto* for soprano, mezzo-soprano and tenor. Small-scale contrast - the dynamic and rhetorical oscillations of the mezzo-soprano aria - is thus matched by large-scale contrast - the interjection of the 'Dies irae' material.

Britten's *lento e maestoso* 'Liber scriptus' is much more compact than Verdi's, but revels in similar contrasts. It also outlines the lyric prototype, this time without a continuation. (Phrase A begins at fig. 28 and phrase A' at fig. 29. Phrase B begins at fig. 31 with the return of the soprano voice after the chorus interjection. Fig. 32 marks the beginning of phrase C, which begins in a way similar to phrase A, but integrates a flat-side modulation and progressive fragmentation.) Typically for Britten, a ternary return is suggested simultaneously with a 'progressive' form. Moreover, Verdi's use of regular four-bar units is replaced by Britten with a more fluid design, consisting of 7 bars, 9 bars, 10 bars and 10 bars. Rests fragment the soloist's line and interjections from the chorus occur irregularly throughout the passage.

The soprano melody starts immediately with leaps and dotted rhythms, suggesting assertive strength. Dynamic volatility is introduced with frequent *fp* indications. Britten, like Verdi, integrates dynamic contrast with a sharp diminuendo to *pp* (fig. 29). Rests

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[39] Giuseppe Verdi, *Requiem*, p. 40.
[40] *Ibid.*, p. 42.
[41] *Ibid.*, p. 43.

punctuate the descending line, coinciding with Verdi's setting of 'nil in ultum'.[42] At this, the chorus enter with imitative layered interjections ('Quid sum miser tunc dicturus'),[43] marked *pp*. At fig. 31 the soprano melody begins again inverting the E-A leap of the opening phrase, effecting a shift to A major. Once again this is coloured by *fp* markings, leading to a layering of the soprano's assertive *f* declamations with the hushed, imitative 'salva me'[44] of the chorus. Britten's choice to layer the text here suggests 'drama': the soprano sings ardently, even accusingly, of the 'King of fearful majesty' while the chorus responds with supplicant pleading: 'Save me'. Not only does Britten allude to the 'operatic' lyric utterance, but also to elements of dramatic conflict.

Moreover, Britten and Verdi's subsequent settings of the 'Lacrymosa' both incorporate the topic of *sospirato*, the sobbing, sighing lament figures that illustrate supplication in the face of divine terror [Figs. 8.8a and 8.8b]. The 'dramatic' is again invoked as rhetorical signifiers of fragility and expressiveness mark the infiltration of the 'human' in the archetypal liturgy. In the *War Requiem* the soothing prayers of a quasi-'mother figure', whose line arches caressingly over the punctuated, fractured utterance of the chorus, suggest an attempt to heal (fig. 54). The poignancy is heightened as the halting rests suggest a struggle against emotion, and even enforced restraint. As the individual steps out of the chorus, there is an affective play between free expression and constraint, a yearning towards, but suppression of, the dramatic that, paradoxically, renders the moment even more 'operatic'.

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[42] Giuseppe Verdi, *Requiem*, p. 43.
[43] Benjamin Britten, *War Requiem*, p. 33.
[44] *Ibid.*, p. 35.

Fig. 8.8a Britten's 'Lacrymosa', pp. 62-63.

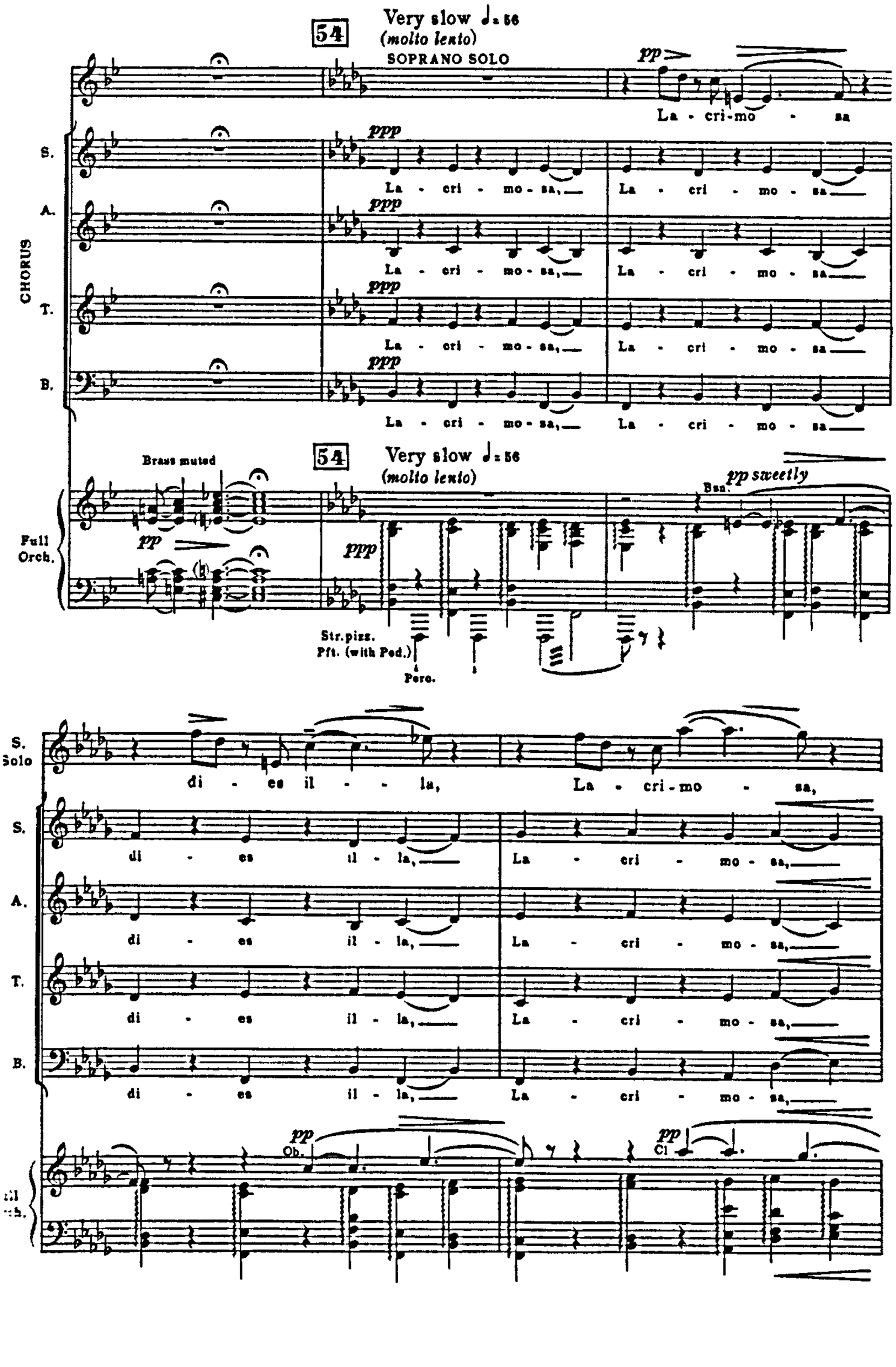
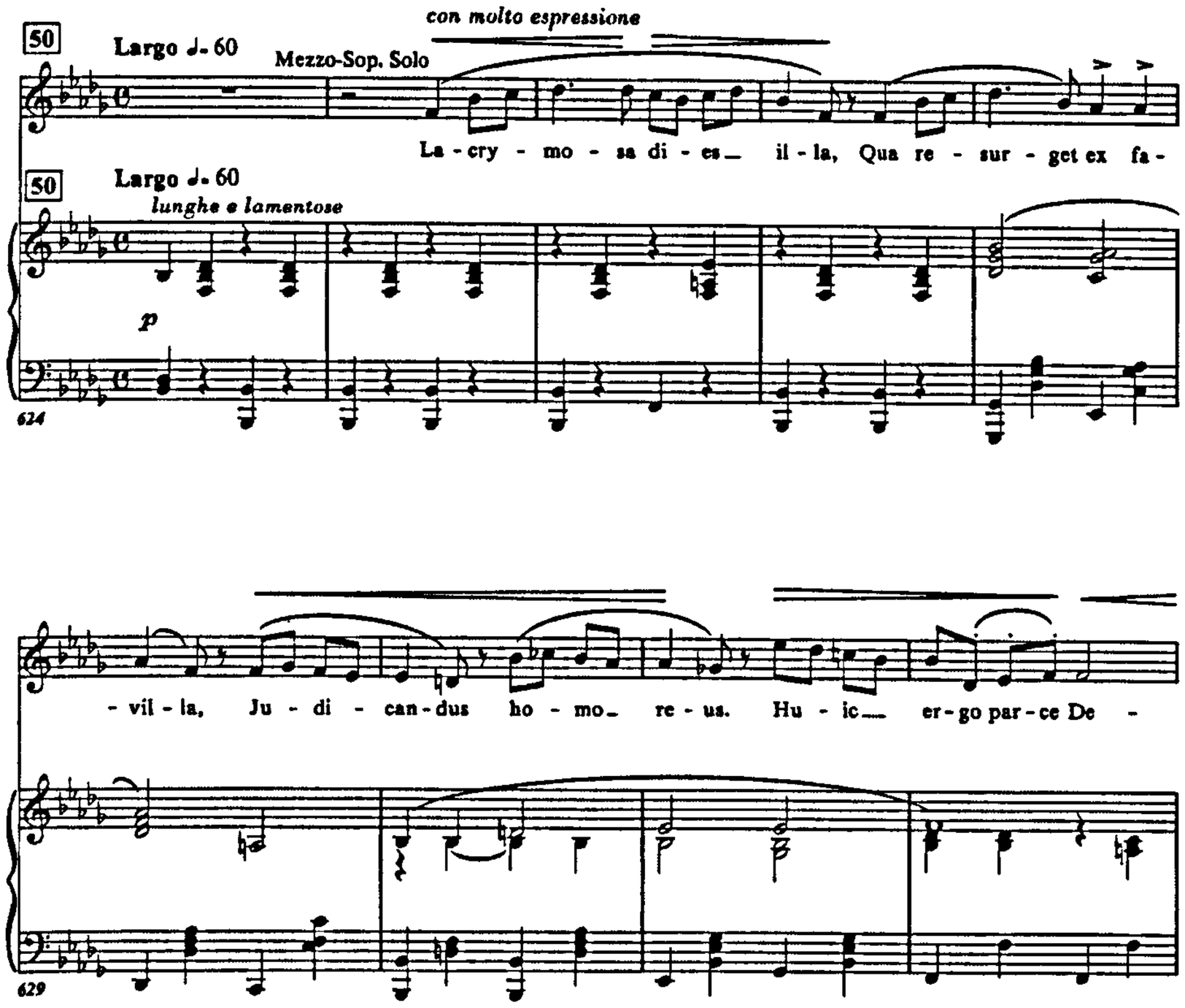


Fig. 8.8b Verdi's 'Lacrymosa', p. 90.



5. *Offertorium* and *Sanctus*: irony, (fake) fugues and layering

If the *Dies irae* is predominantly characterised by emotional intensity, the *Offertorio* is characterised by irony.[45] This is most clearly manifest in the fugal section (fig. 64), which Britten bases on a jaunty melodic fragment from his *Canticle II*.[46] The intertextual reference here, a rare example of Britten's self-borrowing, acts as an ironic counterfoil to the Owen poetry that follows in the central section of the movement. The invocation of the 'Abraham and Isaac' text, both in the fugue and more overtly at the words 'An angel' (an exact quotation from the opening of the *Canticle*) in the central section (fig. 74), heightens the intensity of Owen's chilling phrase: 'But the old man

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[45] Donald Mitchell, 'Violent Climates', *Cambridge Companion to Benjamin Britten*, p. 208; James D. Herbert, 'Bad Faith at Coventry: Spence's Cathedral and Britten's "War Requiem"', *Critical Enquiry*, Vol. 25, No. 3, 1999, pp. 535-565.

[46] Eric Roseberry, '"Abraham and Isaac" revisited: Reflections on a Theme and its Inversion', *On Mahler and Britten*, pp. 253-266.

would not so, slew his son,/ And half the seed of Europe one by one'.[47] Awareness of the 'latent' words associated with the self-borrowed reference, as well as the story outlined by the *Canticle*, intensifies the ironic affect, resulting in a potent bitterness. Moreover, as Rupprecht notes, this extra-musical reference blurs the line between the sacred and the secular, as sacred elements are also present in the Owen setting.[48] (Verdi's *Requiem*, too, incorporates intertextuality. The 'Lacrymosa' of the *Dies irae* is based on a discarded duet from *Don Carlos*.)[49]

The fugal working, here, is a direct reference to the 'sacred' tradition. But as a result of ironic juxtaposition with the Owen poetry, its 'sincerity' is called into question: it becomes 'fake', a 'sign' of the liturgical. The highly imitative 'Pleni sunt caeli et terra'[50] that occurs in Britten's *Sanctus*, may also be considered as a 'fugue' (fig. 85). However, the free chanting effect simultaneously invokes Britten's operatic chorus writing, for example the chaotic hubbub of the hotel guests in *Death in Venice* [Figs. 8.9a and 8.9b]. Britten plays with the signification of the fugue, suggesting dramatic as well as sacred meaning. Verdi uses a strict fugue in the *Sanctus*, but the form is frequently associated with non-religiosity in his operas: the conspirators in *Un ballo*, the battle in 1865 *Macbeth*, the final 'burla' in *Falstaff*.[51] The plainsong of Verdi's *Offertorium* recalls the prayer to the Fthà in *Aida* and even the mock-litany in *Falstaff*. (We may add the mock-hymn in *Albert Herring* as an example of this in Britten's oeuvre.) Somewhat surprisingly, operatic instances of 'sacred music' may even be *more* religious than the *Requiem* at times. As Rosen notes: 'The *Requiem* lacks liturgical sounding cadences, with decorated suspensions or chains of suspensions (as when Don Carlos, disguised as a student, blesses the meal in *La forza del destino*, Act II scene i; the organ prelude at the beginning of the Act II Finale of the same work; or the 'Amen' of Bardolfo and Pistola in *Falstaff*, Act I.'[52] Thus, 'theatrical' representation of the 'sacred' blurs with 'sacred' utterance to add another layer of irony.

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[47] Benjamin Britten, *War Requiem*, p. 90.
[48] Philip Rupprecht, *Britten's Musical Language*, p. 211.
[49] David Rosen, *Verdi: Requiem*, p. 10; Mary Ann Smart, 'In Praise of Convention: Formula and Experiment in Bellini's Self-Borrowings', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, Vol. 53, No. 1, 2000, pp. 25-68.
[50] Benjamin Britten, *War* Requiem, p. 104.
[51] David Rosen, *Verdi: Requiem*, p. 96.
[52] *Ibid.*, p. 97.

Fig. 8.9a Britten's *Sanctus* 'fugue', p. 104.

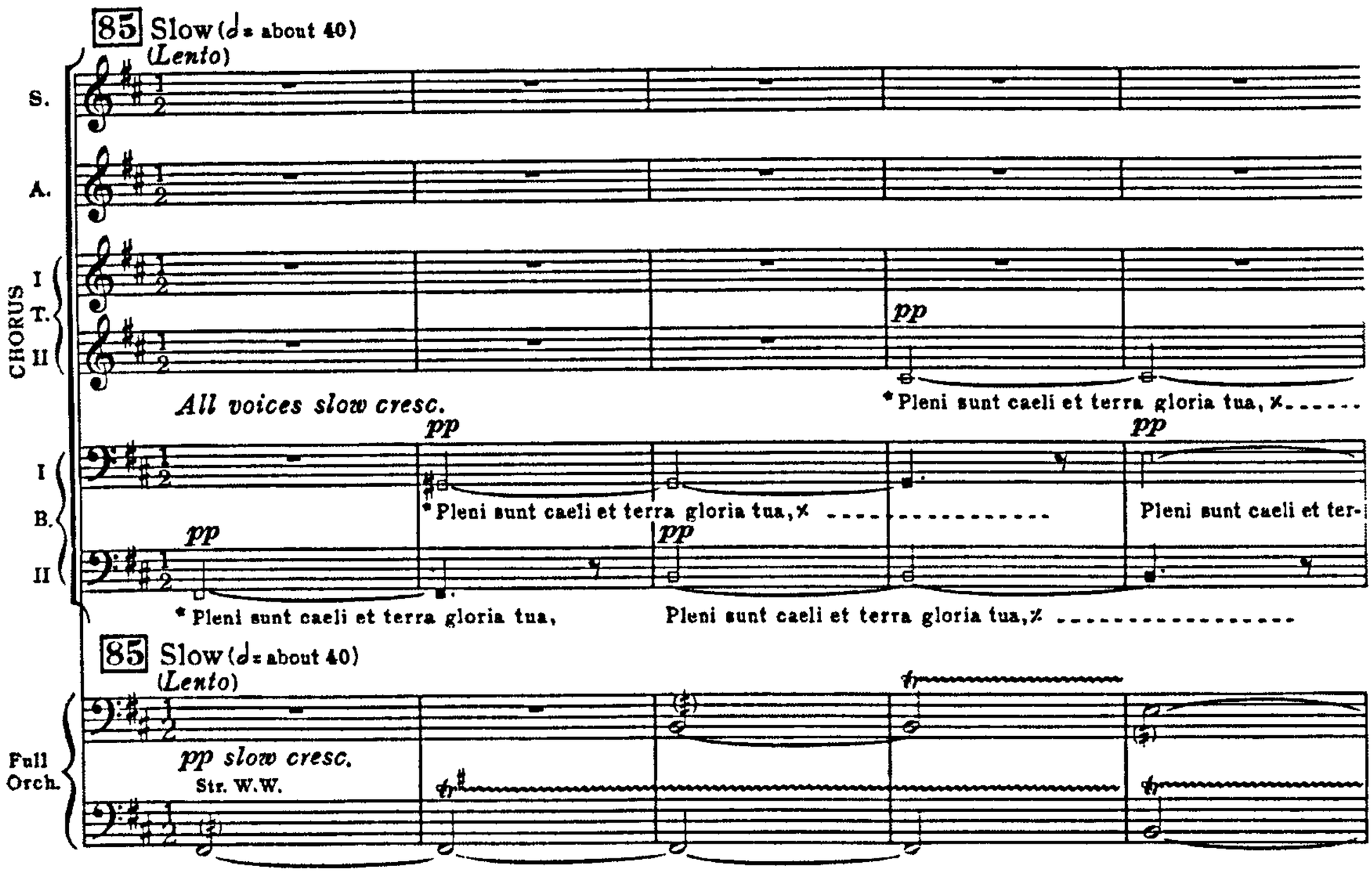
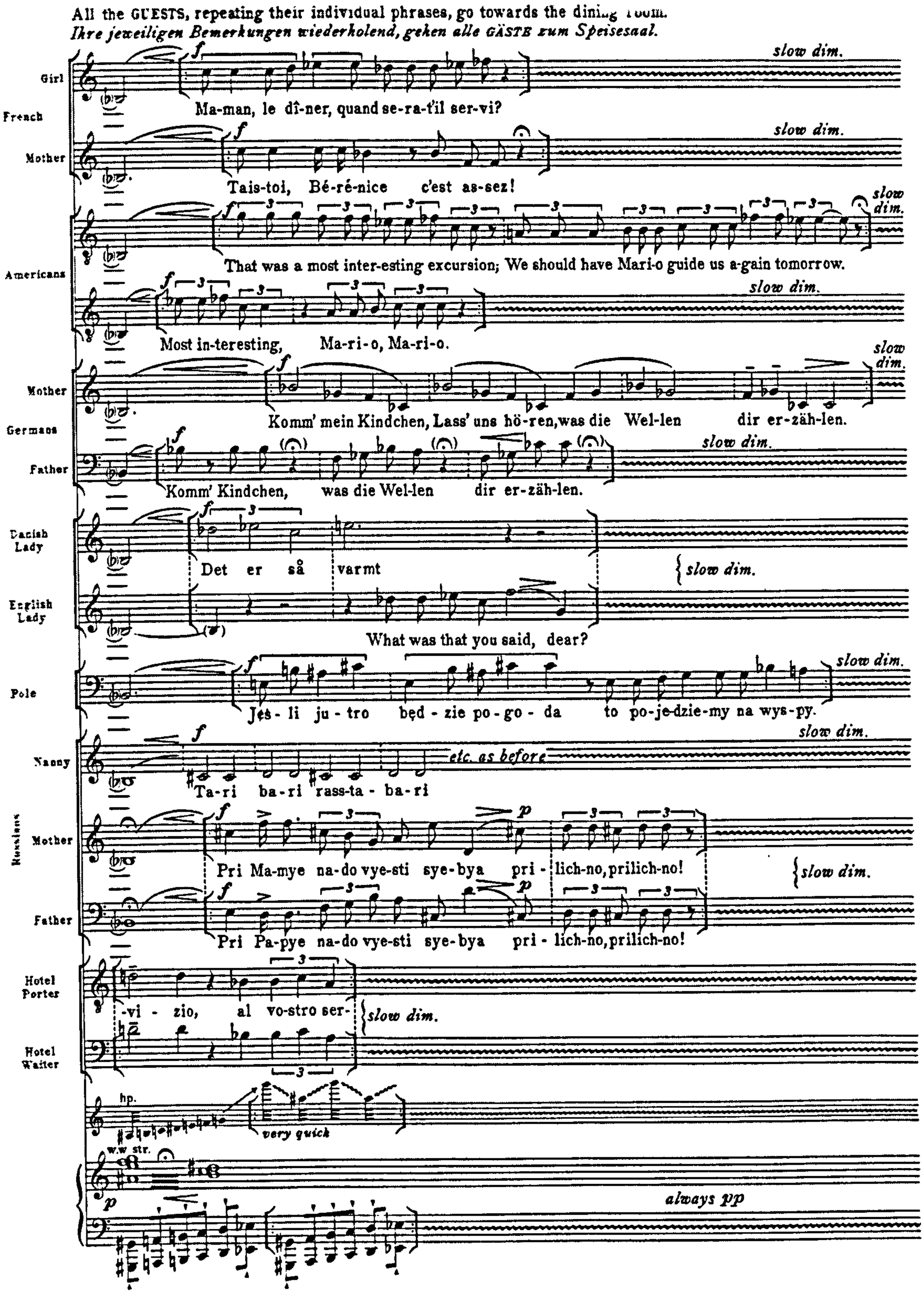


Fig. 8.9b Hotel hubbub in *Death in Venice*, act I, p. 71.



Layering is used literally and ironically in Britten's *Offertorium*. At fig. 77 the boys' chorus overlaps with the disintegration of the tenor and baritone duet. The textual

references to death and youth ('the seed of Europe')[53] make this coincidence sharply critical: the sonic presence of the boys' voices emphasises the painful loss of young life suggested by the repetitions of 'half the seed of Europe one by one'.[54] Moreover, the *alla marcia* performance direction may be understood as an allusion to men marching relentlessly to the front-line. The irony is underlined by Britten's choice to repeat, 'Quam olim Abrahae' in inversion, here, with the last fading phrases of 'one by one'; a co-incidence that at once highlights the tragedy of war and also the impossibility of true consolation. Even the boys' chorus, the ethereal voice, is 'marred' by march allusions, implying perhaps, that religious practice cannot atone for conflict, and even contributes to it.

6. *Agnus Dei*: *canto popolare* and textu(r)al subversion

Somewhat surprisingly, irony is compounded in Britten's apparently consolatory *Agnus dei*. Here, just as in the Verdi *Requiem*, a simple melody - *canto popolare* - set in octaves is repeated three times, with cumulative intensity, before dissolving into the coda. The 'simplicity' of the form is redolent of the 'diegetic' songs found frequently in Verdian opera, as discussed in relation to the popular themes of the sailors in *Billy Budd*.

Britten layers the 'Agnus Dei' text with a ternary setting of Owen's 'At Calvary near the Ancre'; another example of textural 'confrontation'. The gentle undulations of the soothing *pp* accompaniment support first the tenor line and then the answering homophonic chorus. These alternations continue to the end of the movement, which concludes with the only textual addition to the Latin liturgy made by Britten: 'Dona nobis pacem'.[55] The simplicity of the setting is subtly disrupted, however, by surprising expressive markings (for example the accent on 'hangs' in the tenor part), varied section lengths and uneven rhythms in 5/16 time. Moreover, the implications of the textual layering undermine the lilting, comforting effect of the movement. Below the façade of peaceful acceptance runs the message that to love is *not* to fight and a suggestion of the hypocrisy of priests who feel pride in relation to war: a highly

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[53] Benjamin Britten, *War Requiem*, p. 91.
[54] *Ibid.*, p. 91.
[55] *Ibid.*, p. 129.

subversive gesture. Indeed, the Pacifist message, here, proves as effective as the tempestuous protestations of the *Dies irae*.[56] By veiling the message Britten makes it all the more potent.

7. *Libera me*: refrain forms and 'dramatic' rhetoric

As Boyd observes, one of the most striking similarities between the Verdi *Requiem* and the *War Requiem* is the recurrence of the G minor *Dies irae* material as a refrain in the *Libera me*.[57] In both works this thematic return occurs in shortened form and serves as a 'unifying' element. Significantly, however, Britten adds an internal refrain – 'libera me' – to this external reference. The 'libera me' repetitions, with their pleading circling motion, weave through the movement. These recall Verdi's frequent use of refrain patterns in his introductory scenes, for example, in a very different affective context, the 'laughing' theme in the opening scene of *Falstaff*.

Britten's *Libera me* involves three levels of affect: peace, terror and fear-driven supplication. As opposed to the two levels of diction identified by Rosen, it appears that Verdi also creates three.[58] Moreover, this tri-partite diction is broadly mirrored by the three movements of the *Sinfonia da Requiem*: 'Lacrymosa' - supplication, 'Dies irae' - terror, 'Requiem aeternam' - peace.[59]

In Verdi's *Requiem* the opening *scena*, *tempo d'attacca* and aria invoke supplication and fear. The 'Dum veneris' is coloured by *tremolando* figures, chordal punctuations and stuttering *sospirato* diction, producing an effect of extreme vulnerability (9 bars before fig. 90). The 'Dies irae' then re-introduces the terror of the earlier movement (fig. 92). Peace is implied by the soprano and *coro* 'Requiem' (fig. 98), and finally supplication returns for the remaining sections: *scena*, *fuga*, *tempo d'attacca*, *preghiera* and *scena*. The very personal utterance of the soprano *preghiera* recalls the prayers in *Otello* (Desdemona's 'Ave Maria'). Here, a member of the chorus with no fixed 'identity' participates in highly 'personal' utterance. Lyric utterance in the *War Requiem* may be similarly understood as an exploration of the 'temporary' identity

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[56] Donald Mitchell, 'Violent climates', p. 208.
[57] Malcolm Boyd, 'Britten, Verdi and the Requiem', p. 3-4.
[58] David Rosen, 'The *Libera me* and its Genesis', *Verdi: Requiem*, pp. 60-74.
[59] Mervyn Cooke, *Britten: War Requiem*, p. 54.

of singers who step out of the choral background for a moment to assume the costume of 'personal' experience before receding once more into communal anonymity.

These three layers of rhetoric are also present in Britten's setting. The opening (section I) suggests supplication and fear, through the tense circling 'libera me' gestures and *tremolando* accompaniment. The upward wailing motive is a clear reference to Verdi [Figs. 8.10a and 8.10b]. Furthermore, the *sospirato* of the soprano in the 'Tremens factus' (fig. 108) is extremely close to Verdi's setting. The 'Dies irae' suggests terror (fig. 113), leading to the tempestuous climax, where the 'topic' of the 'dance of death' colours the score. This trope has, as Mitchell has described, been integrated into many of Britten's sacred and political works, suggesting not only terror and destruction, but also the potentially catastrophic results of a non-pacifist position.[60] After 'Strange meeting' (fig. 118), 'Let us sleep now', and 'In paradisum' suggest peace, culminating with a complex layering of all the forces of the work, a sign of 'reconciliation' (fig. 127). Yet, with the return of the 'Kyrie eleison' (fig. 137), we are left with a feeling of irresolution and anxiety. The inclusion of this material - a cyclical return - re-introduces the 'fragility' of earlier endings. Fear-driven supplication, as in Verdi's *Requiem*, closes the work. Moreover, the 'coldness' of the tritone bells re-creates the affect of the very opening: conveying the fear, perhaps, that supplication will never be enough to grant forgiveness for war.

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[60] Donald Mitchell, 'Violent Climates', p. 202.

Fig. 8.10a Verdi's 'wailing motive', p. 176.

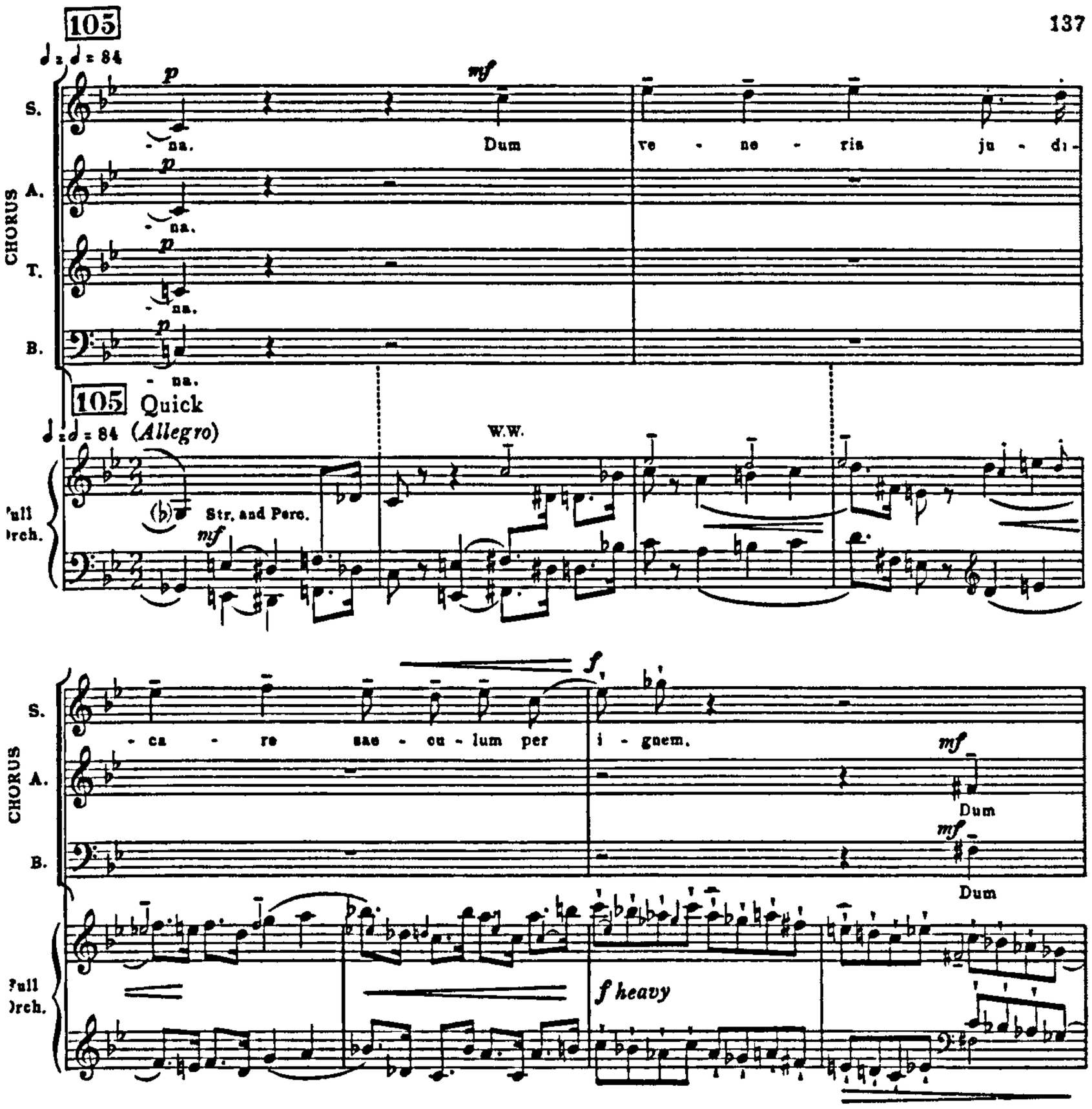
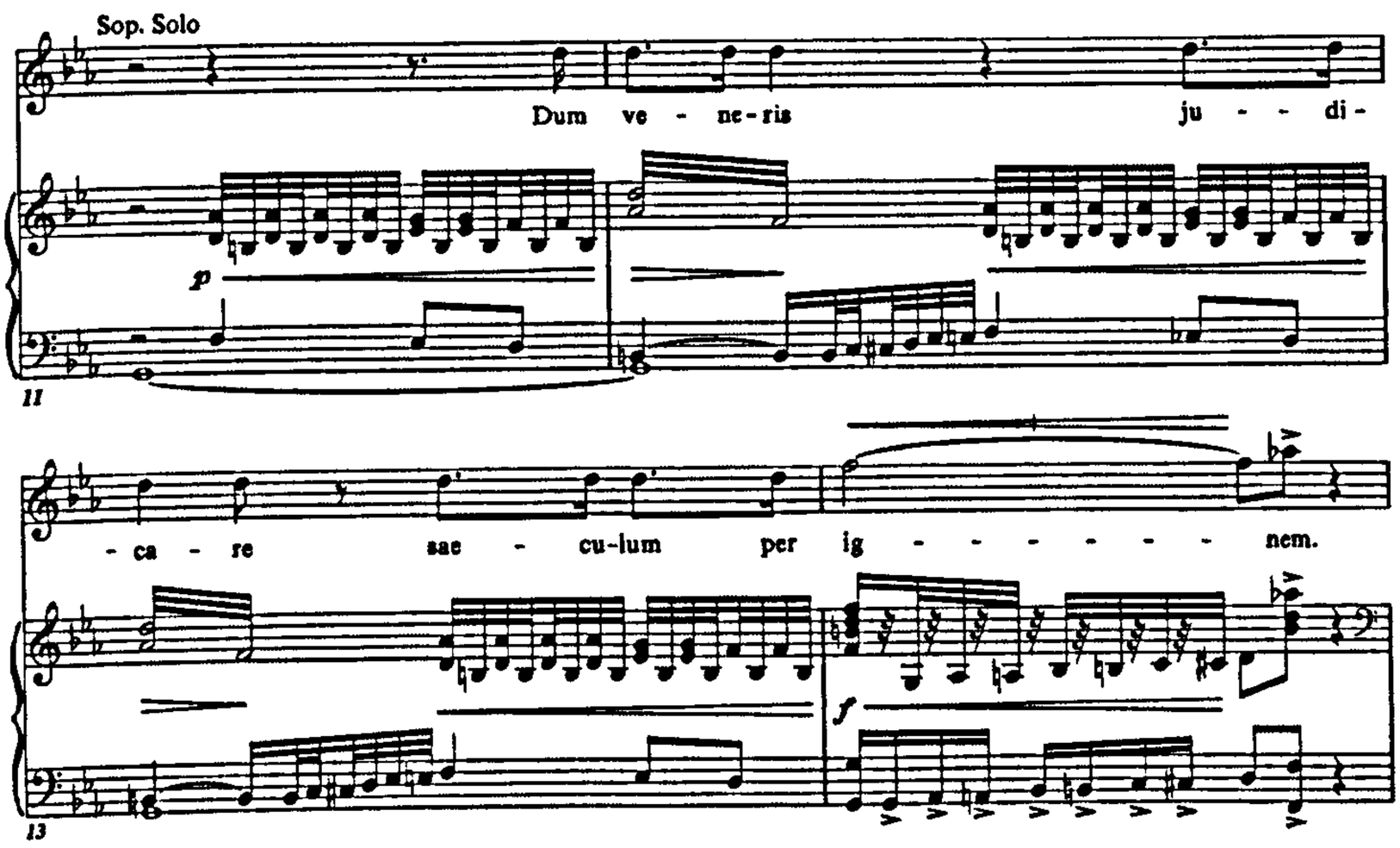


Fig. 8.10b Britten's 'wailing motive', p. 137.



8. Ritual utterance and an uncertain peace

The ending of the *Libera me* focuses a pivotal difference between Verdi and Britten's settings of the 'Requiem' [Figs. 8.11a and 8.11b]. After the homophonic *tutta forza* declamation of 'Domine, libera' and a final soaring line for the soprano, arching over the choral texture and climaxing with a high C (fig. 113), Verdi closes his *Requiem* with a passage of solemn *parlante* over a tense tremolando accompaniment, which finally 'rests' on a consonant C major chord. A question-mark appears to hover over this conclusion; a slight shadow is cast over the work's assertion of salvation.[61] Yet, despite the hushed tone and the gradual dissolution, there *is* a feeling of peace and closure, suggesting that the chorus' calls for freedom 'from eternal death' will (almost certainly) be granted.

Britten's ending, however, is far less conclusive, far less restful. The return of the chilling tritone bells and the unsettling hymn-like 'Kyrie eleison' mean that the promise of peace proclaimed by the text is rendered uncertain. Drawing on Linda and Michael Hutcheon's work on death and mourning in opera, it seems that Britten, in step with many other twentieth-century artists, is unable to provide, or fully believe in, the possibility of 'transcendence', and divine justice.[62] The bitterness of the Owen poems, which constantly question, disturb and challenge the liturgical text, underlines the point. The uncertain peace of the Latin ending is thus complemented by the certain 'peacelessness' of the Owen settings. In a more emphatic way than Verdi, Britten introduces doubt into the *War Requiem*: doubt in the power of the numinous to save, and even doubt in the ability of the rite to achieve its consolatory purpose.

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[61] David Rosen, *Verdi: Requiem*, p. 74.
[62] Linda and Michael Hutcheon, *Opera: The Art of Dying*, Cambridge Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 2004, p. 98.

Fig. 8.11a The ending of Britten's *Libera me*, p. 179.

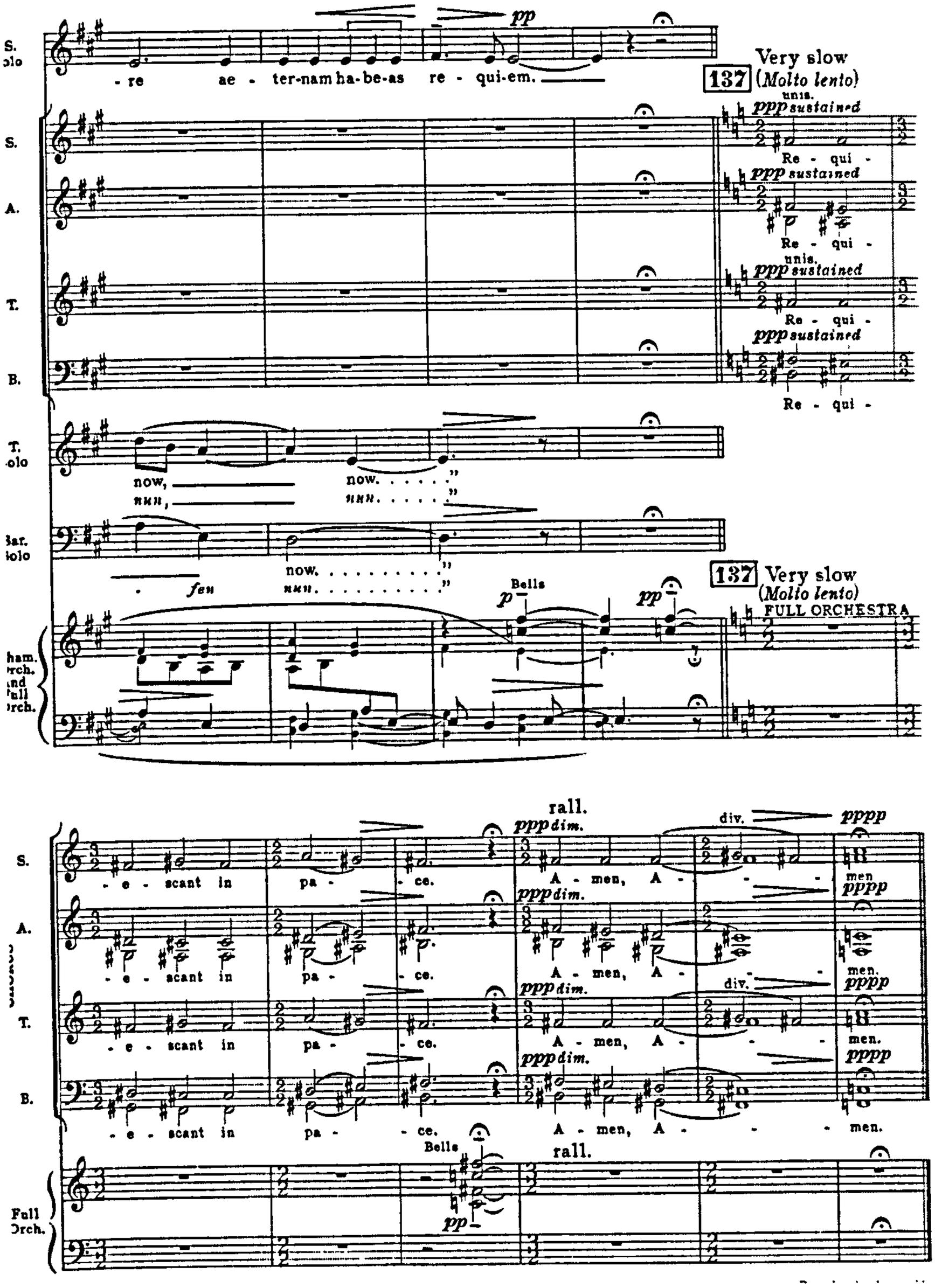
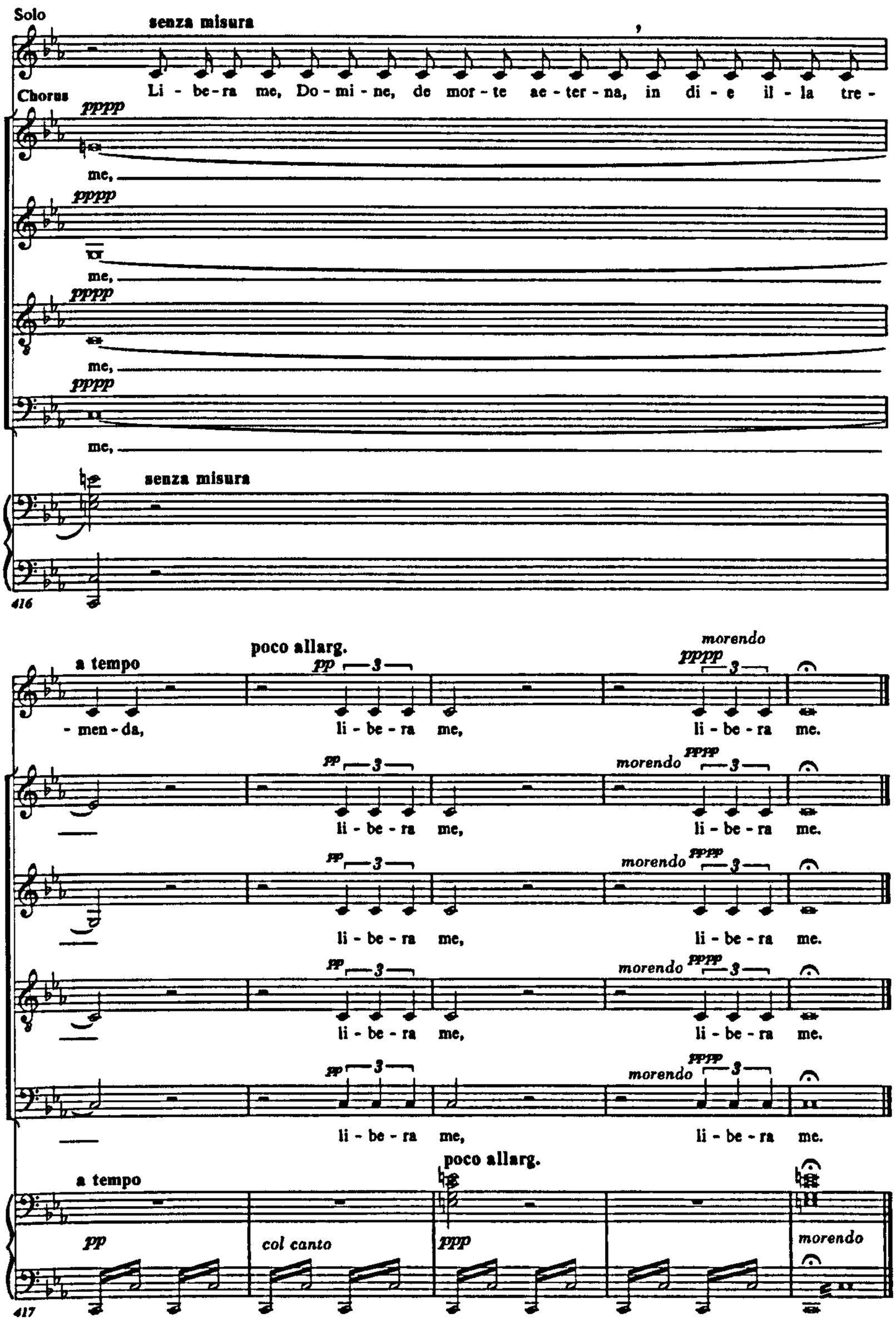


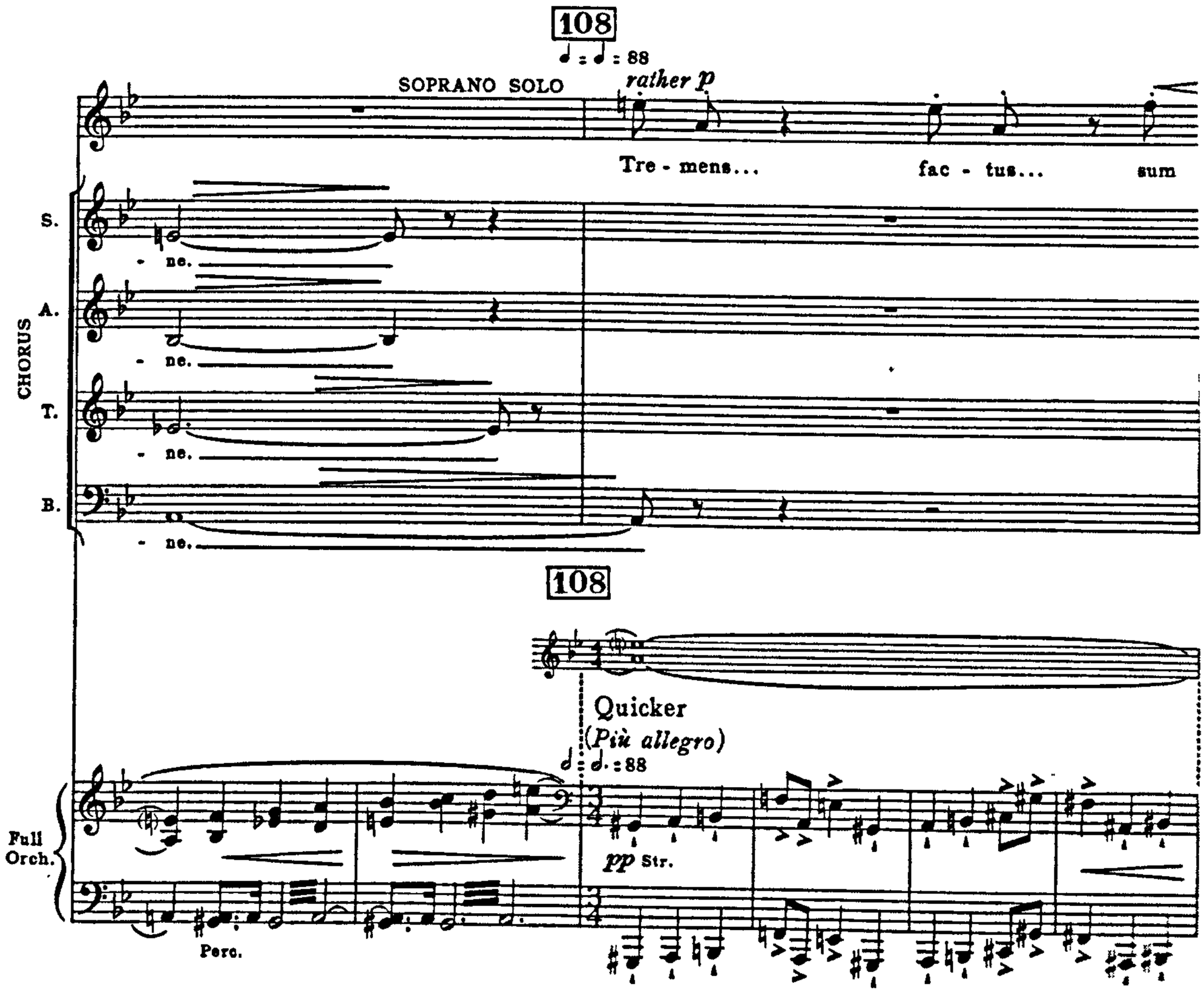
Fig. 8.11b The ending of Verdi's *Libera me*, p. 218.



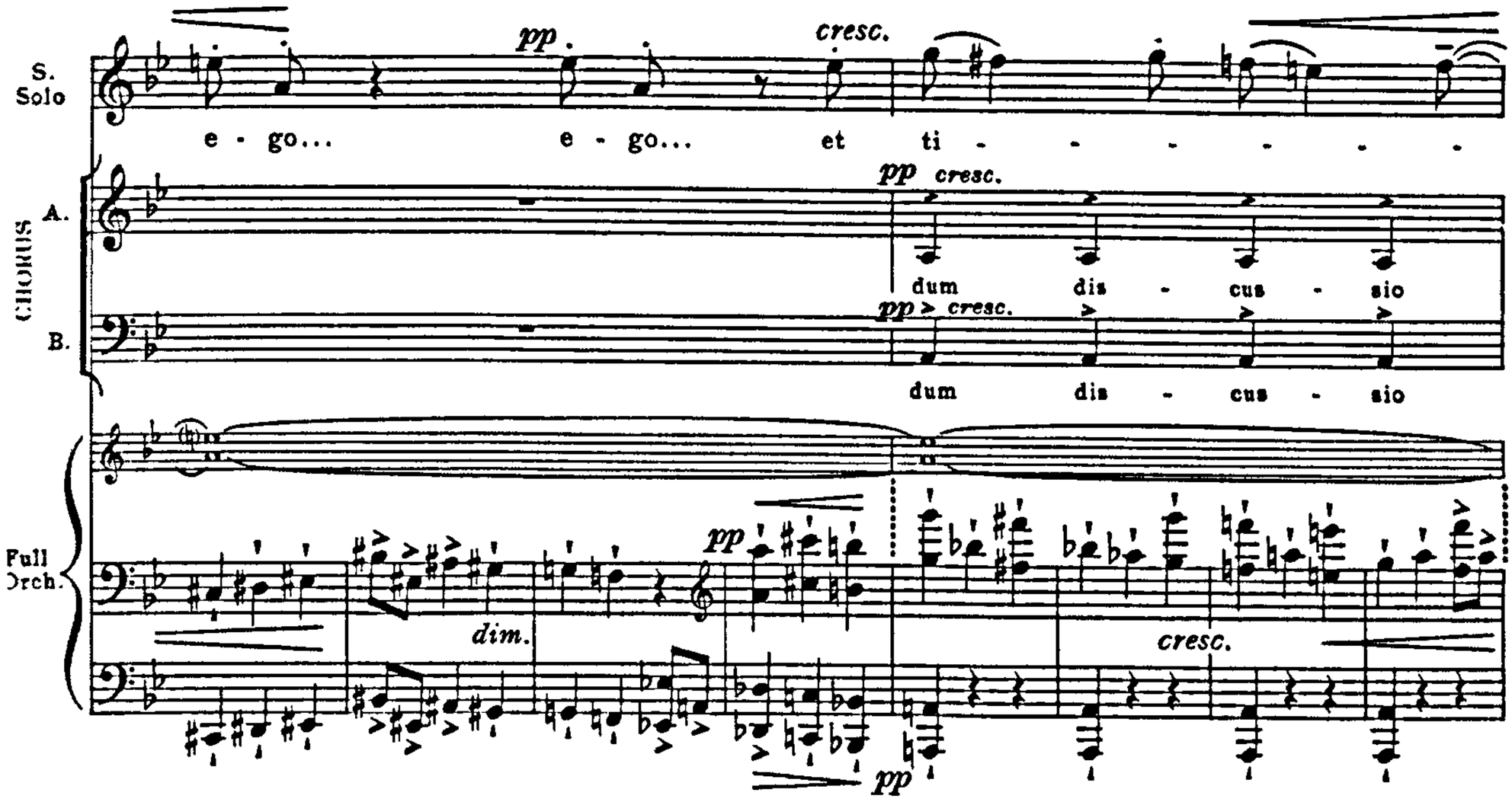
The doubt identified here may begin to explain the *War Requiem*'s lapses into 'dispassion' (or at least suppressed passion), particularly in the liturgical sections. Indeed, Britten appears, at times, to reinforce, even exaggerate, the ritual elements of the score to achieve a critical distance from its message; to allow for the possibility of simultaneously 'believing in' and 'not believing in' the text. This 'distancing' is frequently achieved through the use of single-pitch intonations and ostinato patterns. Moreover, recognition of the *War Requiem*'s identity as ritual influences the effect of the dramatic elements identified above. When 'operatic' gestures are absorbed into the

work they are transformed by their context. In the 'Tremens factus' of the *Libera me* for example, the dramatic and ceremonial come into direct confrontation, as the emotional tone of the soprano solo is actively resisted by the obsessive (non-strict) ostinato patterns of the accompaniment [Fig. 8.12]. (Interestingly, these orchestral gestures recall similar ostinato figurations in Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms*.) Here, then, we experience the simultaneous presence of two opposing forces: that of dramatic expression, an outpouring of tremulous emotion, and that of ritual restraint.[63] Paradoxically, the co-existence of humanization and de-humanization contributes to the affective power of the moment.

Fig. 8.12 Britten's 'Tremens factus', pp. 141-142.



[63] Theodor Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music*, trans. Anne G. Mitchell and Wesley V. Blomster, New York, Continuum, 2002, p. 120.



Moreover, 'internal' repetition is echoed by 'external' repetition, due to the work's genre. The *War Requiem* is intended as an active, ceremonial commemoration of death to be 'performed' many times. This, too, has important repercussions in relation to the 'dramatic' gestures that colour the work. As Susan Langer notes, 'a rite regularly performed is the constant reiteration of sentiments toward "first and last things"; it is not a free expression of emotions, but a disciplined rehearsal of "right attitudes"'.[64] The 'Tremens factus' for soprano may thus be understood as an 'ideal' expression of lamentation displaying an 'appropriate' sentiment, even an instructive parable of emotional expression. Furthermore, the context implies that the audience will *participate* in the rite itself; that when the soprano sings her Latin verses, they too will vicariously express their own fears and supplications.[65] The soprano thus becomes symbolic of the voice of collective grief. In relation to a 'dramatic' character, therefore, she becomes even more archetypal, explicitly embodying group sentiments rather than defining her own individual identity. (Drama, too, relies on the 'archetypal', but rarely does the theatrical context imply that the characters voice the audience's sentiments so directly.)

In the *War Requiem* the question of empathy is further complicated by the Owen settings. Here, the chamber style seldom includes ritualistic musical signs associated

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[64] Susan K. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite and Art*, Cambridge Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1969, p. 153.
[65] Robert J. Bocock, 'Ritual: Civic and Religious', *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 21, No. 3, 1970, p. 292.

with the 'ceremonial' aspect of the performance. However, taking into account the Hutcheons' view that musical portrayals of death may be read as mourning rites (what they term *contemplatio mortis*) then these moments, too, may be understood as part of the ritual process.[66] Unlike 'dramatic' representations of death, though, Owen's poems deal with nameless victims and adopt a distanced, fleeting gaze. Thus, another tension is established between the audience's empathy with the soldiers' plight, heightened by the affective intensity of Britten's musicalizations, and the impossibility of catharsis as a result of experiencing these 'visions' of death. The Owen interjections challenge the possibility of mourning; they capture the pain and futility of war without demonstrating, even forcibly denying, acceptance.

Britten, thus, fruitfully exploits the tension between the 'sacred' and the 'dramatic' within a ritual context. The 'dramatic' is transformed into the 'ritual-dramatic'. And the constant oscillations between personal experience and communal contemplation, affective empathy and critical restraint, hope and despair, lead towards a very uncertain peace. Verdi's question mark over 'salvation' is thus exaggerated and complicated by Britten: in the *War Requiem* we are confronted with the pessimistic possibility of non-forgiveness.

9. The 'sacred' in the 'secular'

As well as noting the 'secular dramatic' elements in Britten's 'sacred' utterance, we may also note the 'sacred' in his 'secular dramatic' works. Church scenes, signified by the presence of hymn-like material, frequently take place in his operas. Off-stage services, with dramatic interjections in the foreground appear in: *Peter Grimes* (act II scene ii), *The turn of the Screw* (act II scene ii) and *Death in Venice* (act II scene 9). Moreover, *Peter Grimes* is framed by a 'secular hymn' that reinforces the shared identity of the sea-faring community, and *Gloriana* is laced with a recurring hymn of praise to Elizabeth ('Green leaves are we'). *Owen Wingrave*, too, incorporates a secular hymn-like lament, which resonates poignantly with the pacifist message of the *War Requiem*. Prayers to the numinous are also common. In *Billy Budd*, both Billy and Vere appeal to God, and in *Gloriana* Elizabeth has a 'soliloquy and prayer' in act II scene ii.

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[66] Linda and Michael Hutcheon, *Opera: The Art of Dying*, p. 21.

Conversely, threnody is used in jest in *Albert Herring* (act III) as a lament for Albert's *supposed* death, and the children's song for the May King is a hymn parody.[67] 'Sacred' utterance may often become threatening, even sinister in its dramatic context: the hymn in *Peter Grimes* is symbolic of communal hatred, as well as strength, and Claggart's *credo* in *Billy Budd* is an appeal to evil. In *Death in Venice*, too, the 'Hymn to Apollo' leads not to love, but to a lonely death without Christian solace. Whittall draws attention to the 'chant, anthem, canticle, chorale, as well as hymn'[68] references in his non-operatic works, both vocal – notably *Saint Nicholas*, *Winter Words* and *Sechs Hölderlin-Fragmente* – and instrumental – notably the *Suite for Harp* Op. 84. These range from obvious intertextual gestures to allusions that become assimilated into Britten's utterance. A similar range of secular references to the sacred is clearly evident in Verdi's operatic output, too, from the passionate prayers of Desdemona in *Otello* to the sinister prayers of the priests in *Don Carlos*.[69]

Comparison of the *War Requiem* and the *Requiem* thus highlights not only the Italianate nature of Britten's writing but also his exploration of the 'dramatic' potential of the sacred genre within a ritualised context. Split signification, formal resonances and generic allusions result in an eclectic range of references that combine with richly 'reactive' results. It is the presence of these 'inner conflicts' that, paradoxically, heightens the affective impact of this powerful, and at times deeply disturbing, pacifist work.

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[67] It alludes to Wesley's 'Hark how all the welkin rings' and W. H. Monk's *Württemburg*. Arnold Whittall, Along the Knife-Edge: The Topic of Transcendence in Britten's Musical Aesthetic', *On Mahler and Britten*, p. 295.
[68] Arnold Whittall, 'Along the Knife-Edge: The Topic of Transcendence in Britten's Musical Aesthetic', p. 293.
[69] Rodney Edgecombe, 'Conventions of Prayer in some 19th-Century Operas', *The Musical Times*, Vol. 146, No. 1893, Winter 2005, pp. 45-6.

Chapter IX

Venetian *Tinta* and Verdian Generic Types in *Death in Venice*

In the opening scene of *Death in Venice* the Traveller implores Aschenbach to 'go, travel to the south',[1] adopting a vocal tone that is at once exotically seductive and chillingly macabre. The teasing undulations of 'marvels unfold' (heard just prior to this invocation), the ambiguous tonality of the held chords, the transparency of the woodwind scoring and the exotic pounding of the drums, suggest not only the exciting, yet sinister, present, but the delightful, yet dangerously illicit, future that awaits him beyond the Alps. Amongst the graves of the Munich cemetery Aschenbach is awakened to 'a thirst ... a leaping wild unrest, a deep desire!'[2] that leads him ineluctably towards Italy. This moment of 'aural seduction' is the beginning of his journey to Venice, a place that promises not only sensuality and creative renewal but madness and death. Indeed, it is the nature of Aschenbach's 'external' and 'internal' journey that provides the focus of the opera.

Britten's *Death in Venice* also embodies a *musical* journey South. The opera contains many allusions to *tinta* techniques and draws on generic scenes derived from Verdian models. This chapter considers Britten's creative relationship with Venice and the material contained in the 1971 'Venice Sketchbook', the Venetian *tinta* of the work, and references to, and transformations of, Verdian ballet-scenes, laughing-choruses and dream-scenes.

1. Britten in Venice and the 'Venice Sketchbook'

Like Aschenbach, Britten was drawn to Venice for its restorative powers and creative promise. As we saw in chapter one, not only did Britten travel to Italy for numerous

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[1] Benjamin Britten, *Death in Venice*, p. 13.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 13.

recital tours and holidays with Pears,[3] but he also journeyed to Venice for the purpose of composition. Britten's descriptions of Venice suggest that he had an acute 'sonic image' of the city. He frequently mentions the 'church bells', the beauty of the Italian language, the lapping water, the traditional cries of the gondoliers, and the plainsong of San Marco. Furthermore, Myfanwy Piper who, as librettist of the opera, accompanied him to Venice for the premiere of *The Turn of the Screw*, suggests that like herself Britten was fascinated by the Venetian street musicians. In a letter to Mitchell she recalls: 'When the first night was over and we had eaten at the delectable *Fenice* restaurant we walked back across St Mark's Square, starlit and silent except for the sound of a melancholy little café band.'[4] As she also notes, this moment is 'wonderfully evoked… in *Death in Venice*,'[5] forming the back-drop to Aschenbach's pursuit of Tadzio in act II scene 9.

Many of these 'sonic impressions' are captured in Britten's 'Venice Sketchbook', which he begun during his 'research trip' to Venice with Pears and the Pipers in 1971 in preparation for the composition of the opera.[6] Britten recounts that the visit was 'fruitful (operatically)' and, in a letter to the Giffords describes '3 chilly hours in a Gondola [where they were] … rowed hither & thither noting all the gondoliers' cries ([from] a specially selected G[ondolier] who remembered all the old ones).'[7] These Gondolier cries are found on page three of the sketchbook. In addition, pages one to four of the book include musical sketches of two other distinctively Venetian sounds: the church bells and the liturgical plainsong of San Marco.

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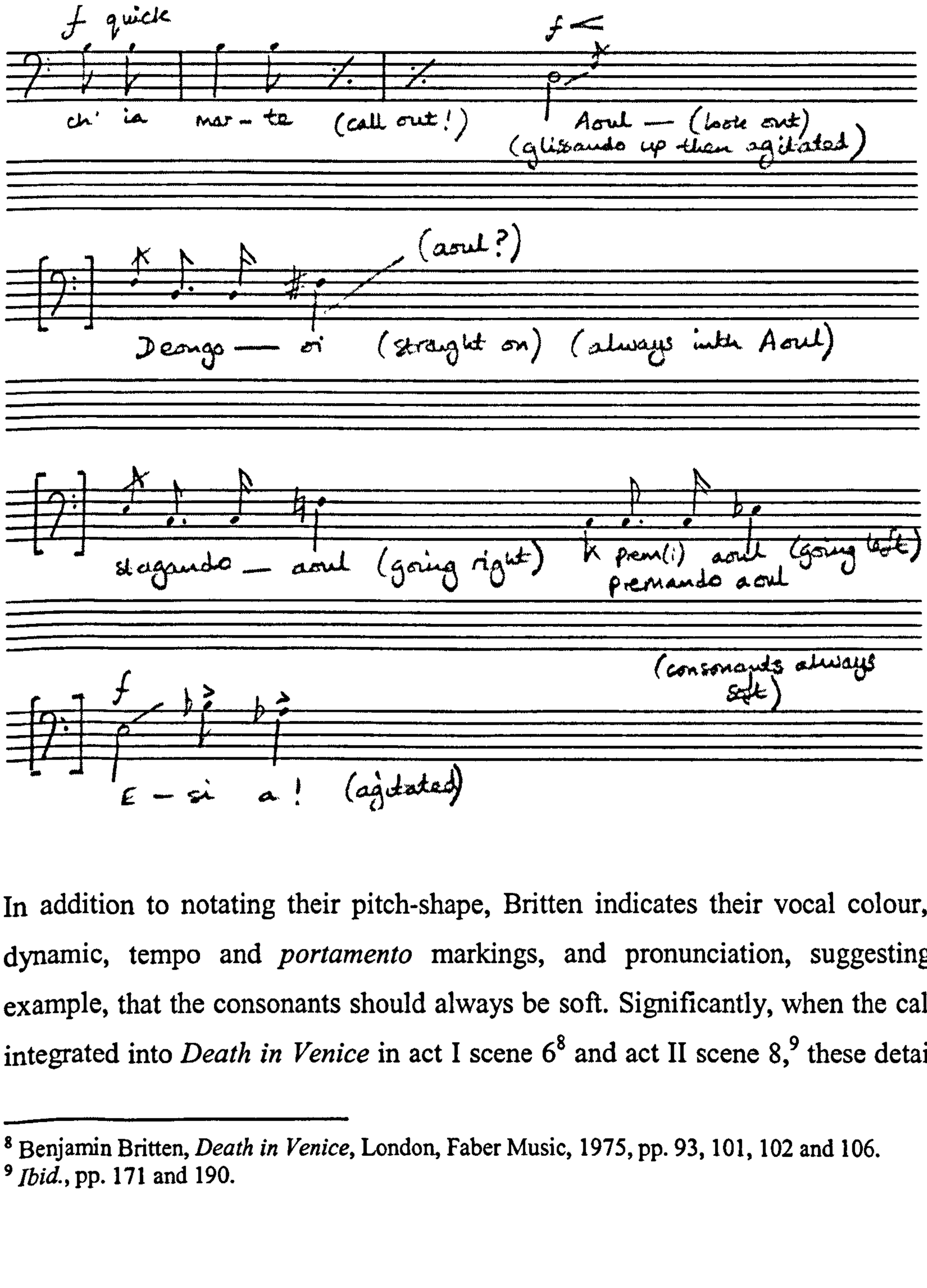
[3] Britten's early trips to Venice:

1934 30 March – 7 April	Florence, Italy	International Society for Contemporary Music (ISCM) meeting, with premiere of Britten's *Phantasy* No. 2
1947 26 April – 5 May	Italy	Concert tour with Pears
1948 27 January – 12 February	Italy	European tour (Italy, Switzerland and the Netherlands) with Pears
1949 23 January – 12 February	Venice, Italy	Holiday with Pears
1949 16 April – 21 May	Italy	Recital tour (Italy and Belgium) with Pears

[4] Letter from Myfanwy Piper to Donald Mitchell, October 1954, quoted in: *On Mahler and Britten*, p. 230.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 230.
[6] BPL, ID: 2-9202672.
[7] Humphrey Carpenter, *Benjamin Britten: A Biography*, p. 534.

The 'gondolier calls' in Britten's sketchbook consist of six distinct cries: (1) *'ch'ia mante'* ('call out!') notated in equal quavers, marked *f* and *quickly*; (2) *'aoul'* ('look out!') notated as a minim with a *portamento* slide to a grace-note a third above, marked *f crescendo*; (3) *'delongoi'* ('straight on!') with a distinctive dotted rhythm and rising major third; (4) *'stagandoaoul'* ('going right!') with a distinctive rising fourth; and (6) *'premandaoul'* (going left!) with a distinctive rising minor third [Fig. 9.1].

Fig. 9.1 *Venice Sketchbook*: gondolier calls



In addition to notating their pitch-shape, Britten indicates their vocal colour, with dynamic, tempo and *portamento* markings, and pronunciation, suggesting, for example, that the consonants should always be soft. Significantly, when the calls are integrated into *Death in Venice* in act I scene 6[8] and act II scene 8,[9] these details are

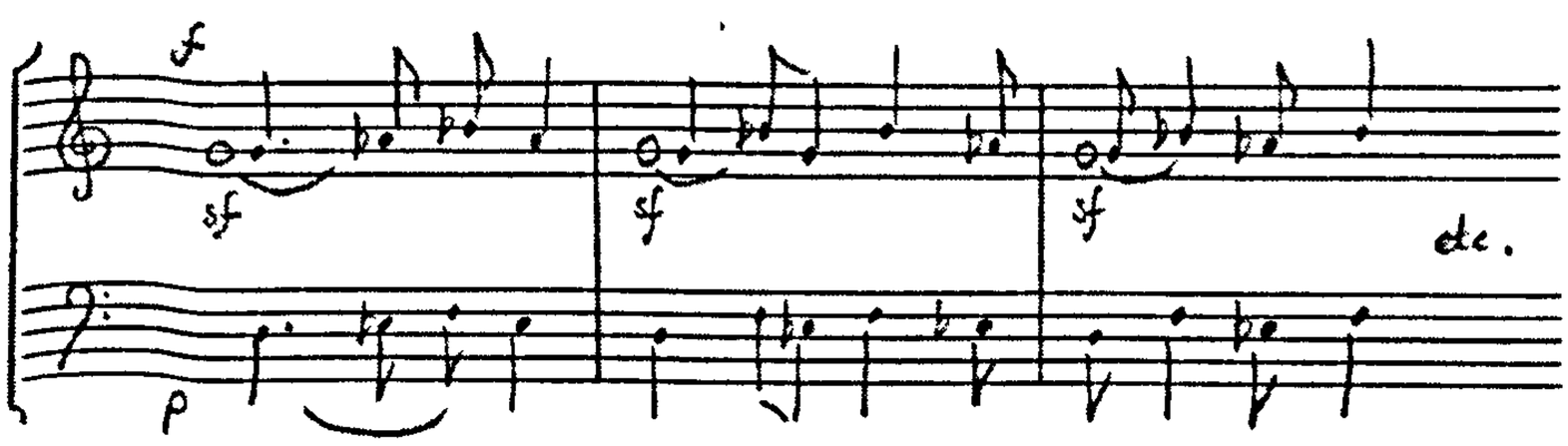
[8] Benjamin Britten, *Death in Venice*, London, Faber Music, 1975, pp. 93, 101, 102 and 106.
[9] *Ibid.*, pp. 171 and 190.

included as performance directions. They are also used semi-realistically. For example, in the pursuit scene in act II scene 8, two gondoliers call 'look out!' and their cries are echoed at a distance by a third gondolier off-stage. As the journey continues, the gondolier steering Tadzio's boat cries 'going right!' and this is repeated by Aschenbach's gondolier, clearly in pursuit. The calls then merge seamlessly into the music that follows. Aschenbach also absorbs the sound but not the *meaning* of the cries into his own speech, which begins 'Ah Tadzio'. This watery exchange suggests 'realistic discourse' as well as creating an illusion of spatial placement.

We may imagine Britten laughing a little over the 'realistic' use of these cries and their 'hidden' meanings, but their inclusion suggests a more serious interpretation. The calls, which Aschenbach cannot understand, intensify his mounting helplessness, eroding still further his sense of self-control. By aiding Aschenbach in his quest for Tadzio, and thus, by extension, leading him towards his death, the gondoliers, like the Traveller in act I, take on the significance of fateful Hermes figures. Venice itself appears to be colluding against him. Interestingly, too, the only time that the 'going left!' cry is heard in the opera is when Aschenbach attempts to leave Venice, in act I scene 6;[10] a covert sign, perhaps, that to leave would be to contravene destiny.

Britten's sketch, entitled 'St Mark's Bells', [Fig. 9.2] also features prominently in the opera.

Fig. 9. 2 *Venice Sketchbook*: St. Mark's bells



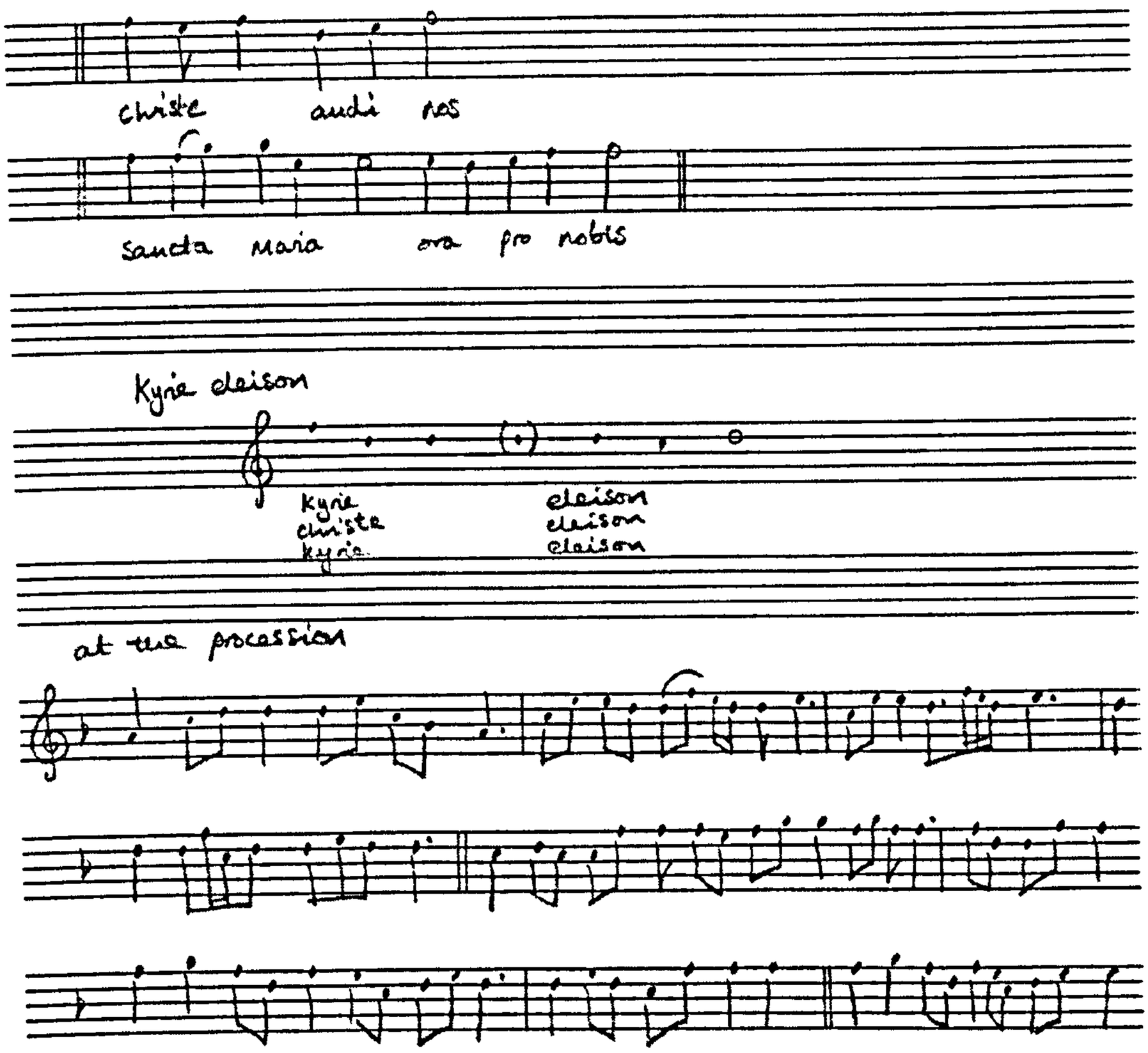
The aural impression of the bells is captured here through the use of overlapping tones: the first note of each bar is held through the bar to evoke the slow diminuendo of the first note of the peal. The phrase is further characterised by fourths between the

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 106.

upper and lower lines and metallic *sforzando* markings that imitate the intensity of sound as the bells are first struck. When this passage appears in the 'Venice Overture' in act I scene 2, the pattern is raised by a semitone and the rhythm is altered. Nevertheless, the mimetic quality remains, enhanced by the metallic percussion instrumentation. Moreover, Britten's inclusion of the bells towards the *end* of the Overture suggests that the goal of this journey is not Venice in general, but St Mark's Square in particular. However, as with the gondolier cries, this sound-picture is a fusion of 'reality' and fantasy; it describes a journey to a decidedly 'imaginary' destination.

The liturgical chant on page four of the sketchbook [Fig. 9.3] also relates to the Venice Overture.

Fig. 9.3 *Venice sketchbook*: San Marco plainsong.



As Colin Matthews and John Evans note, the 'Kyrie eleison' forms the basis of the recurring heterophonic brass passages that punctuate the music.[11] Moreover, Britten's plainsong notations, contained in the *Litaniis Majoribus et Minoribus* from the *Liber Usualis*, herald more far-reaching allusions.[12] While, the 'Exurge Domine' does not appear prominently in the opera, the 'Kyrie eleison' is the main focus of the San Marco church-scene in act II scene 8. Aptly, the setting of 'Sancta *Maria* ora pro nobis' becomes 'Sancto *Marce* ora pro nobis' in the opera, presumably in honour of St Mark. This musical phrase, with its original text, also features prominently in the 'Sancta Maria' from Claudio Monteverdi's *Vespers* (*Vesperae Beatae Mariae Virginis*) of 1610, a work that Britten owned and admired. Indeed, the Aldeburgh Festival programmes for 1971-73 include numerous performances of Monteverdi's sacred as well as secular works.[13] Notably too, the 1973 Festival featured a concert entitled 'Venice to London 1590-1620', incorporating works by Gabrieli, Gesualdo, and Merulo as well as Monteverdi. Furthermore, the placement of the notations on the page of the sketchbook is intriguing. If the service was conducted as the *Liber Usualis* suggests, Britten's sketches are in the wrong order. It is possible then, that he was reminded of Monteverdi's music while sitting in San Marco and notated it *before* the service: an act of musical association.

Britten's invocation of Monteverdi, who himself worked and died in Venice, suggests further associations between the *Death in Venice* Overture and the sacred-music tradition of San Marco. Not only do the 'mock-antiphonal' effects created by alternating brass and percussion textures recall Monteverdi's handling of *ritornelli* in the *Vespers*, creating an illusory sense of spatial placement, but the recurring brass

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[11] Colin Matthews, 'The Venice Sketchbook', *Cambridge Handbook: Death in Venice*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 55-86.

[12] The difference in notation between the sketch and the litany suggests that Britten was writing from a performance rather than, as Evans suggests, a copy of the plainchant. John Evans 'Britten's Venice Workshop', pt. i: 'The Sketch Book', *Soundings*, Vol. xii, 1984-5, pp. 7-24 and pt. ii: 'The Revisions', Vol. xiii, 1985, pp. 51-77.

[13] 1971: Janet Baker (with Raymond Leppard, piano, and Joy Hall, 'cello) - Claudio Monteverdi's: *Quel sguardo sdegnosetto*; *ecco di dolci raggi*; *Si dolce e il tormento*; *Maledetto sia l'asetto*.
1972: Wandsworth School Choir directed by Russell Burgess – Monteverdi's *Lamento d'Arianna; Lasciatemi morire.*
1972: Anna Reynolds (with Jose-Luis Garcia and Kenneth Sillito violins) - Monteverdi's 'A Dio, Roma' from *L'incoronazione di Poppea.*
1973: 'Venice-London, 1590-1620'. The Wilbye Consort (Elaine Barry, Ursula Connors, Margaret Cable, Nigel Rogers, Geoffrey Shaw) conducted by Peter Pears and accompanied by The Jaye Consort of Viols - Andrea Gabrieli (*Pass' e mezzo antico*), Carlo Gesualdo (*Dolcissima mia vita*), Claudio Merulo (*Canzonas*), Claudio Monteverdi (*Si, ch'io vorrei morire*).

passages recall the polychoral instrumental music of Giovanni Gabrieli, designed specifically for the basilica, for example the *Pian é Forte* Sonata. Moreover, Britten's writing here resonates with Stravinsky's re-invention of Venetian church-music, in particular the 'Euntes in mundum' from *Canticum Sacrum* (1956), which is dedicated to St Mark. This movement draws on the *pian é forte* style of Gabrieli's sonata. Britten, however, replaces *dynamic* polarity with *timbral* alternation. In *Death in Venice* Britten thus not only creates a complex 'sound-scape' of Venice based on affective transformations of his 'realistic' observations, but also alludes to the music of Venetian composers and their artistic descendents. His evocation of the 'flavour' of Venice also resonates strongly with Verdi's nineteenth-century operatic scene-painting.

2. Verdian *tinta*

For Britten, as for Verdi, evocation of *place* in opera is a central concern, and *Death in Venice* is imbued with a distinctive Venetian coloration, or in Verdian terms, a pervasive *tinta generale*.[14] Here, the *tinta* is created through the use of sounds that are associated with the setting (such as the gondolier cries, bells and plainsong described above), distinctive generic types and thematic colouration. This colour is achieved through a continuation and transformation of the techniques observed in *Gloriana* (as seen in chapter six).

In *Death in Venice*, as in *I due foscari*, Venice is invented through generic colouration, in particular through the use of *barcarolle* forms [Fig. 9.4]. The *barcarolle*[15] is a gondolier song in 6/8 time reflecting what Britten terms 'the indolent swaying water.'[16]

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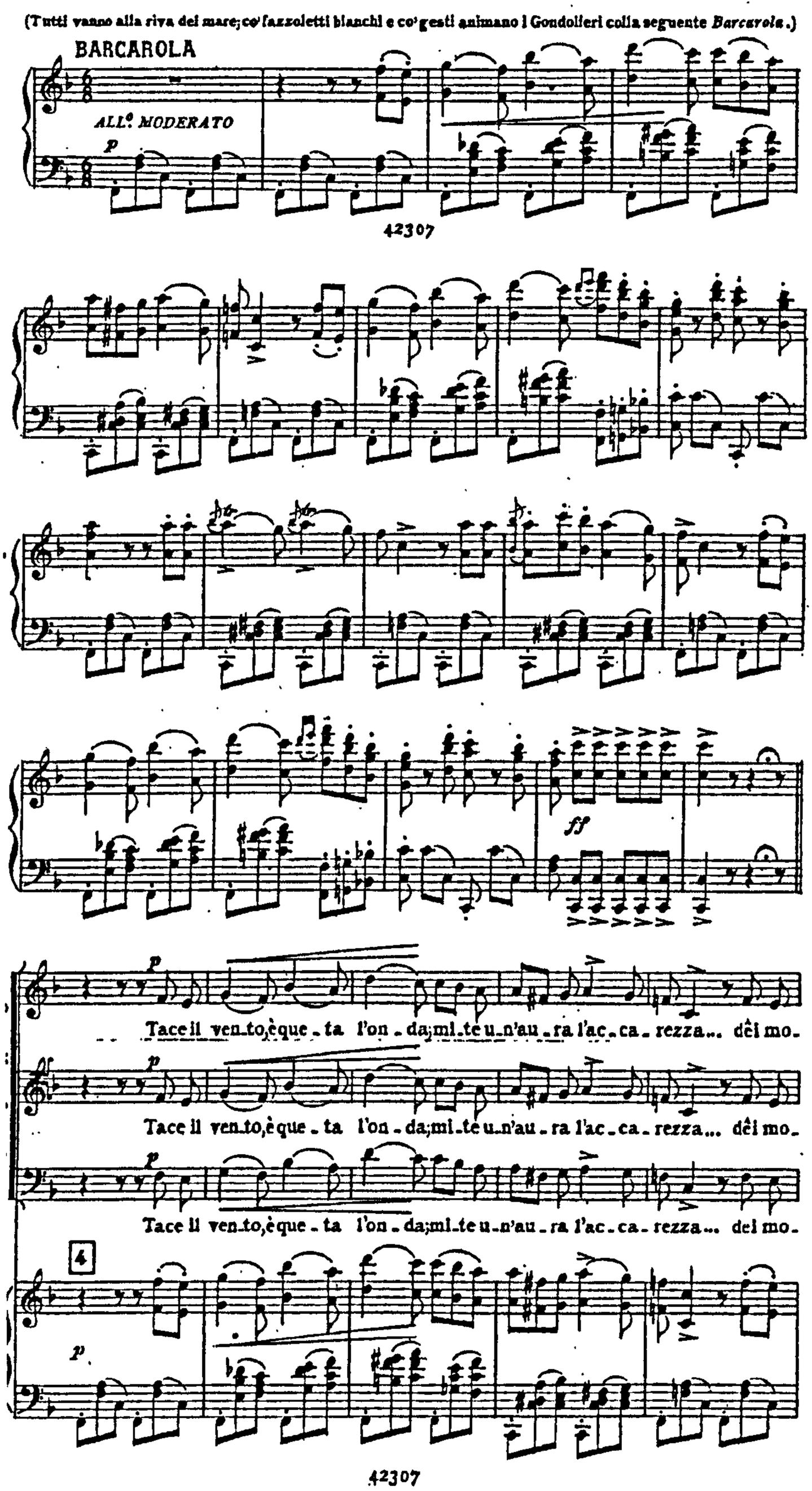
[14] David Rosen, 'Meter, Character and *Tinta* in Verdi's Operas', *Verdi's Middle Period: Source Studies, Analysis, and Performance Practice*, ed. Martin Chusid, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1997, pp. 339-392.
[15] David Rosen, 'Meter, Character and *Tinta* in Verdi's Operas', p. 339.
[16] Benjamin Britten's 'Venice Sketchbook', p. 8. BPL: 2-9202672.

Fig. 9.4 Chorus barcarolle, Giuseppe Verdi, *I due Foscari*, Introduzione e barcarola, act III



Such *barcarolles* are numerous in the operatic repertoire of the nineteenth century and are famously present in Jacques Offenbach's *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* (act IV no.

17)[17] and Amilcare Ponchielli's *La Gioconda* (act II scene 2). They are also well known from Mendelssohn's *Lieder ohne Worte* for piano, which include two pieces entitled 'Venezianisches Gondellied' (Op. 19, No. 6 and Op. 30, no. 6). These Venetian pieces feature 'gondolier cries' as well as *barcarolle* rhythms. Indeed, in the Op. 30 'Gondellied' the initial 'cry' (a rising minor third) is absorbed into the subsequent 'duet textures', reminiscent of the way in which the Gondolier calls are absorbed into Aschenbach's speech in act II scene 8.

Tellingly, in the 'Venice Sketchbook' (p. 1) Britten notates the *barcarolle* in its customary 6/8 time. In the 'Venice Overture', however, the usual rhythmic form is subtly transformed. Although the triplet subdivisions in the bass are clear, the rhythmic ambiguity and shifting textures obscure the steady lilt usually associated with the genre. Moreover, as opposed to the celebratory choral set-piece in Verdi's *I due Foscari*, the *Death in Venice* barcarolle is affectively ambiguous, and the generic *tinta* is strikingly pervasive, occurring during each of Aschenbach's eight gondola rides to form a large-scale refrain through the operatic structure.

In the Pursuit Scene (act II scene 9) Aschenbach's location *within* Venice is also musically described. His quest for Tadzio is sonically illustrated as he walks from the Rialto to the San Marco Piazza (signified by the on-stage *banda*), into the basilica (signified by the plainsong *Kyrie*), through the bustling streets (signified by the calls of the street sellers), along labyrinthine canals (signified by watery *barcarolle* rhythms and gondolier cries) and finally to Tadzio's hotel door. This complex collection of musical references creates a detailed 'sound-map' of Venice, contributing to the intricacy of Britten's Venetian *tinta*. (Aschenbach's frenzied progress is also characterised by the obsessive passacaglia-like recurrences of the 'pursuit theme'.) Moreover, his pantomime pursuit through shifting sound-scapes appears to be inflected by his own perceptions: we hear Venice, at least partially, through Aschenbach's ears. Thus, the brass passages first heard in the Venice Overture are disquietingly distorted when they return in the basilica scene. The optimism that accompanied Aschenbach's journey to Venice – if we are to understand

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[17] Pears sang the role of Hoffmann in Offenbach's opera for the first time on 6 May 1942 at the Strand Theatre, London, in a production by George Kirsta for Albion Opera Limited, conducted alternately by Walter Süsskind and Hans F. Redlich.

the Overture as an evocation of *his* idealised musical invention of Venice as well as the invention of the 'omniscient' orchestral narrator – is replaced by painful realism. The theme that symbolised Venetian promise in act I has become 'infected', diseased to reflect Aschenbach's own 'corruption'. Furthermore, in the café scene his external perceptions of the jocular street music and internal perceptions of Tadzio's music are heard simultaneously, creating a dissonant and uncanny effect. The bi-tonality (C/A major) underlines the rupture between Aschenbach's 'outer' and 'inner' experience. Moreover, the simultaneous presence of humour (the light frivolity of the Players) and painful disorientation (Aschenbach's increasing psychological turmoil) is strikingly Verdian. As shown below, such 'ironic' diction also characterises the Player's Scene, act II scene 10, and is central to Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera*.

Venice is not only evoked instrumentally. The Venetian cries in *Death in Venice* are various, ranging from the Strawberry Seller who tempts Aschenbach with her beguiling *bel canto* lines, her sensual diction emphasising her role as seductress and bearer of deadly (forbidden) fruit (act I scene 5 and act II scene 16), and the demotic *concertato* discourse of the stall owners in the thronging market (act I scene 6 and act II scene 9). The 'macaronic' text, here, including many colloquial Italian phrases, intensifies the vocal *tinta* of Venice. Moreover, these characters, like the gondoliers described above, appear to collude against Aschenbach. They 'guard the city's secret'[18] and realise, intuitively, the inevitability of Aschenbach's demise.

Furthermore, the composite 'Hermes' figure (the Traveller, Hotel Owner, Barber, and Leader of the Players) is also, in some guises at least, Italian; a complex and contradictory agent of fate whose speech is characterised by the 'no boundaries hold you' motif and distinctive timpani instrumentation. There is diversity in this unity, however, as the aggressively obsequious insinuations of the Hotel Owner contrast with the leering demotic song of the Leader of the Players, the perilous seductiveness of the Traveller from beyond the Alps and the Barber's light 'patter-song' banter. Indeed, the Barber's diction is particularly varied, including arching *bel canto* lines ('Guardate, signore'),[19] rapid *parlante* ('permit me to aid it just a little'),[20]

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[18] Benjamin Britten, *Death in Venice*, p. 187.
[19] *Ibid.*, p. 240.
[20] *Ibid.*, p. 241.

Sprechstimme ('Grey?')[21] and jaunty staccato articulations. These vocal 'exaggerations' render him a comic and decidedly grotesque Italian figure.

It is Aschenbach's inability to 'envoice' Venice – beyond allusions to the diction of the gondolier (act I scene 3) and his adoption of the Elderly Fop's song (act II scene 16) – that marks his distance from it. Although he travels South in *body*, it appears that the people and places around him remain a beguilingly fascinating and yet unreachable 'other'. While the recurring rising E major theme, first heard in the Traveller scene in act I (p. 14) suggests Aschenbach's erotic elation, his *emotional* journey South, his recitative and lyric forms remain symbolic of his German nationality, even drawing upon the style of that anther Venetian 'visitor' Heinrich Schütz. His 'German' recitative-like diction weaves itself introspectively through, and occasionally fuses with, the Venetian 'sound-scape' to create a split *tinta*. Moreover, the musical world of Tadzio and his family is far from Venetian. Their dance music is decidedly 'exotic', and the mock-gamelan sonorities underline their significance as figures hailing, symbolically at least, from the land 'beyond the tigers'. *Death in Venice*, therefore, involves a triple *tinta*, the confrontation and intermingling of the musical North, South and East, inviting further comparison with *Aïda*. (Indeed, a binary opposition is also suggested as the North and South that form the West confront the East.)

3. Generic allusions: 'The Games of Apollo'

As well as alluding to Verdian *tinta*, *Death in Venice* also evokes many Verdian generic types, which it significantly transforms. Three scenes of particular interest in this respect are: 'The Games of Apollo' act I scene 7, 'The Strolling Players' scene act II scene 10 and 'The Dream' scene act II scene 13.

Firstly, and somewhat ironically, Tadzio's pantomimic discourse in 'The Games of Apollo' abounds in Verdian Franco-Italian generic allusions. Britten's stage directions here are numerous, and against the background of the chorus and Apollo's narrative, the playful rivalry between Tadzio and Jaschiu is played out through

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 241.

movement.[22] This passage recalls Verdi's graphic musical descriptions, for example (in a very different affective context) of Otello's entrance to Desdemona's room in act IV scene 3 of *Otello*, the 'kiss-motive' of which foreshadows death. However, in 'The Games of Apollo', the actions and their symbolic significance are also described verbally by the quasi-Greek chorus.

Moreover, like the dance scenes in *Aïda*, 'The Games of Apollo' provide a kind of French Grand Opera *divertissement*. In the Verdian manner Britten adopts ballet to define 'otherness' and 'exoticism',[23] as well as to integrate lavish spectacle into the work. These qualities are marked in Tadzio's solo dance[24] as well as the Games themselves.[25] To translate these sections into movement Britten chose Frederick Ashton as his choreographer. In contrast with Verdi's dances, however, the beach games are central to the development of the plot. The scene is a means of focusing Aschenbach's desire for Tadzio and is the direct catalyst for his significant pronouncement – 'I love you' – at the close of the act. While the beach games are not merely a spectacle for the audience, however, they are a glorious visual feast for Aschenbach – that is, if they are *diegetic*. Indeed, there is an ambiguity about the stylised movements of Tadzio and his family. Throughout the opera – and not merely in the ballet scenes – their utterance is raised to the level of dance in the same way that the utterance of the other characters is raised to song. It is tempting to suggest that in the 'Dances of Apollo' the audience is invited to adopt Aschenbach's 'inner' gaze. We may understand the dance as an internalised fantasy on the 'real' games, and the Delphic hymn and Apollonian interjections as Aschenbach's interpretations of this profoundly emotional experience. Moreover, Britten fuses musical forms here, creating a '*ballet-concertato*' that, with its internal repetitions and arithmetical governance, is highly ritualistic. This 'mixed genre' forms a parallel with the choral dances from *Gloriana*.

'The Games of Apollo' also highlight the distance between Aschenbach and his object of desire. Whereas Tadzio communicates through pantomime and dance,

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[22] *Ibid.*, pp. 125-130.
[23] Gunhild Oderzaucher-Schüller, 'Ballet', *Verdi in Performance*, ed. Alison Latham and Roger Parker, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 109.
[24] Benjamin Britten, *Death in Venice*, p. 131.
[25] *Ibid.*, pp. 133-151.

Aschenbach communicates primarily through sound, reasoned rather than impulsive utterance.[26] A little like Fenella in Auber's *La Muette de Portici*, Tadzio is mute, his existence is talked about, reacted to, but ultimately un-psychologised; he is the trigger for Aschenbach's idealisations and fantasies, a means not an end in himself. The dancing characters in Verdian opera are usually in the control of the non-dancing ones. In *Death in Venice*, though, this hierarchy is reversed: it is Tadzio who leads, and Aschenbach who is compelled to follow. Moreover, rather than a delineated Verdian 'set-piece', Tadzio's dances weave through the opera and the dramatic focus constantly shifts between the aural and the visual, highlighting the gulf between the desirer and the desired.

4. 'The Strolling Players' scene

Secondly, 'The Strolling Players' scene alludes to Verdian opera in the manner of jest.[27] The 'masque' or 'burlesque' with on-stage *banda* recalls the narrative entertainments of *La traviata* (act II finale) and the 'play within a play' of Britten's own *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (act III). Here, Britten uses Italian diction ironically, creating mock-popular melodies and delighting in operatic clichés. The performance indications, for example the *con voce infantile* direction in the song of the Leader of the Players, contribute to the *canto popolare* effect. Moreover, the set pieces of the performance – the lover's duet and the two comic songs – act as ironic commentaries on the romantic and religious themes of Verdian opera. The scene emerges as a sparkling and even irreverent parody of Italian music.

However, there are also striking formal parallels between the Players' scene and the act II finale of *La traviata*, which suggest modelling and more serious musical resonances [Fig. 9.8]. (In the diagram the scenes are laid out side-by-side, *La traviata* on the right and *Death in Venice* on the left. The first column indicates the beginning of each sub-section, the second indicates musical 'type', the third tempo and the fourth dramatic events.) Both scenes involve five distinct sections: (1) opening dialogue (*tempo d'attacco*); (2-3) two *diegetic* songs; (4) personal 'confrontation'

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[26] Sandra Corse, 'Death in Venice', *Opera and the Uses of Language: Mozart, Verdi and Britten*, London, Associated University Presses, 1987, pp. 131-151.
[27] Benjamin Britten, *Death in Venice*, p. 198.

(*tempo d'attacco*) and (5) public humiliation followed by personal reflection (*coro, pezzo concertato*). This five-part structure is also present in Thomas Mann's description of the scene, although Britten changes the number of the Players (from four to three), the form of the second *diegetic* song (from a solo song with choral interjections to a solo *arietta*) and the mimed instruments (from 'a mandolin, a guitar, a harmonica and a squeaking fiddle'[28] to flute, guitar and trumpet). Indeed, we may conjecture that it was the similarity between the *structure* of the scene and the act II finale of *La traviata* that reinforced his belief in the novella's operatic potential. In addition to the five-part form and alternation between action (*tempo d'attacco*) and reflection (*coro* and *diegetic* songs), the pacing of the scenes is also similar. In *Death in Venice*, as in *La traviata*, the fast opening tempo intensifies towards the *allegro* 'confrontation' (*tempo d'attacco*) before a complex *largo* (*pezzo concertato*), which effectively reverses the musical momentum.

[28] Thomas Mann, 'Death in Venice', *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, trans. David Luke, London, Vintage, 1998, p. 251.

Fig. 10.8 *La traviata* (Act II finale) and *Death in Venice* (Act II scene 10)

No. 11	***Tempo d'attacco*** Flora, Marquis, Doctor, Party Guests	*Allegro brillante*	Flora, the Marquis and the Doctor prepare for their masquerade	**Fig. 235**	***Tempo d'attacco*** Hotel Porter, Hotel Waiter, Hotel Guests	*Amichevole/ animato*	The Hotel Porter and Waiter prepare for their evening entertainment
No. 12	***Coro e scena*** Gypsies, Flora, Marquis	*Allegro moderato*	The Gypsies sing of their prophetic powers; Flora questions the Marquis about his fidelity	**Fig. 239**	***Duettino*** Girl and Boy (Strolling Players)	*Dolce con slancio*	The Players sing of romance and morality; Aschenbach enters and sights Tadzio
No. 13	***Coro*** Matadors, Guests	*Allegro assai mosso/ Assai vivo*	The Matadors sing a love narrative; Flora invites her guests to the gambling table	**Fig. 243**	***Arietta*** Leader of the Players	*Molto pesante (più lento di sopra)/ Giocoso*	The Leader of the Players sings of the follies of love and the joys of freedom
No. 14	***Tempo d'attacco*** Alfredo, Violetta, Baron, Flora, Gaston, Doctor, Guests	*Allegro/ Allegro agitato/ Allegro sostenuto*	Alfredo arrives and challenges the Baron to a game of cards; Violetta pleads with Alfredo to leave; Alfredo publicly humiliates Violetta	**Fig. 248**	***Tempo d'attacco*** Aschenbach, Leader, Hotel Porter		Aschenbach challenges the Leader about the 'plague in Venice'
No. 15	***Scena e pezzo concertato*** Germont, Alfredo, Violetta, Guests	*Largo/ accelerando*	Germont reprimands Alfredo; all reflect (differently) on the evening's events	**Fig. 252**	***Coro (pezzo concertato) ed arioso*** Aschenbach, Players, Guests	*Lento/ più lento/ molto tranquillo*	Laughing chorus (Aschenbach's humiliation); The guests disperse; Aschenbach reflects on the evening's events

There are many musico-dramatic parallels between the scenes, too. In the first section, the preparations of the Hotel Porter and Waiter recall the preparations of Flora and her friends for their Parisian masque. Here, the conversational nature of Verdi's *parlante* is intensified by Britten: the vocal-lines of the Venetians are marked *freely* and their discourse shifts mock-realistically between rapid utterance amongst each other and the smoother contours of their invocations to the chattering guests.

The second section consists of a *diegetic* love duet between the girl and boy of the Players, based on Ferradini's *Giovanotto mi garbate tanto*. Their song, like that of the sparkling Gipsy dance in *La traviata*, is simple yet alluring and their music, accompanied by mimed flute and guitar, includes popular lilting rhythms, 'question and answer' phrasing and 'innocent' thirds. Moreover, like the chorus of Gypsies, the Players appear to have the gift of foresight. However, while the prophesying capabilities of the Gypsies are *explicit – 'casi del futuro possiamo altrui predir'* ('The future has no mystery we do not understand')[29] – those of the Players are *implicit*. Thus, when Aschenbach enters the entertainment at the words 'dearest, my life is guided by your beauty'[30] we may understand the phrase as a veiled observation concerning his own situation, as well as forming an innocent part of the romantic song; the Players covertly indicate their status as the instruments of Aschenbach's fate. As a result split communication is established as the song holds one meaning for the Players, one for the hotel guests and another highly personalised meaning for Aschenbach. Moreover, as Aschenbach glances towards Tadzio on the terrace, the progress of his desire is accompanied by the words: 'Just as the North star guides the storm-tossed sailor'.[31] The singers perceptively articulate Aschenbach's hidden desires and recognise his status as 'pursuer', as exemplified by his quest for Tadzio in the previous scene. Their song focuses Aschenbach's moral dilemma: 'For you forgotten honour, work and duty … how shall I save my soul?'[32] Aschenbach has risked 'honour, work and duty' for Tadzio and it is his moral crisis – the incompatibility of his erotic yearnings with his rigidly constructed moral framework – that forces him to turn to Hellenic as well as Christian explanations of love and transcendence.

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[29] Giuseppe Verdi, *La traviata*, p. 124.
[30] Benjamin Britten, *Death in Venice*, p. 200.
[31] *Ibid.*, p. 200.
[32] *Ibid.*, p. 201.

In the second set-piece, the insight of the Players becomes increasingly menacing. In his *arietta* (a mock *cavatina-cabaletta* form concerning the follies of love) the Leader of the Players prompts Aschenbach's downfall through psychological manipulation. The diction of the song is exaggeratedly grotesque, and leering falsetto phrases marked *caratteristico* punctuate the jaunty melody, redolent of taunting school-room rhymes. Indeed, it appears that the invocation of child (*con voce infantile*) and parent-figures – '*La mia nonnna* always used to tell me "leave the blondes alone, sonny"'[33] – force Aschenbach to recall traumatic scenes from his own childhood. (In Louis Zinkin's Jungian reading, it is Aschenbach's non-identification with father-figures and denial of his childishness in early life that leads to his failed 'individuation'.)[34] The song thus contributes to Aschenbach's present sense of failure and alienation and, by prompting retrospection, acts as a catalyst for his subsequent psychological deterioration. The character of the Leader of the Players, too, refers to the traditional figure of the 'Pantalone', the prosperous merchant who displays a comic lust for youthful women, according to the conventions of *commedia dell'arte*.[35] Moreover, like the chorus of the Matadors in *La traviata*, brutality (death) is cloaked in frivolity.

Perhaps it is Aschenbach's recognition of the uncanny insight of the Players that prompts him to confront the Leader in the fourth section: 'So is there a plague in Venice?'[36] Communication, however, is denied as the Player conceals the truth of the cholera in discourse that is at once humorous and evasive. By withholding information rather than disclosing it, the Leader once again demonstrates his destructive intentions; if Aschenbach remains unaware of the plague he is likely to meet his death sooner rather than later. The intensity of the exchange also recalls, in miniature, the moment at which Violetta is spurned by Alfredo.

This personal confrontation between Aschenbach and fate is followed by a laughing chorus, lead by the Leader of the Players and the hotel staff. As well as

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[33] *Ibid.*, p. 201.
[34] Louis Zinkin, '"Death in Venice" – A Jungian View', *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, Vol. 22, no. 4, 1970, pp. 354-365.
[35] David Kimbell, *Italian Opera*, p. 284.
[36] Benjamin Britten, *Death in Venice*, p. 205.

reflecting the *coro* ending of *La traviata* act II, the rhythmic laughter here recalls the tip-toeing laughing chorus at the close of act II of *Un ballo in maschera*. However, the 'knowing' laughter of Verdi's conspirators becomes the 'unknowing' laughter of the hotel guests as split communication is once again established. The chorus repetitions of 'how ridiculous you are',[37] a cynical condemnation of romantic love if the text is *understood*, may once again be interpreted as a cruel commentary on Aschenbach's crazed pursuit of Tadzio. However, while the Venetians alone comprehend the dialect of the song, the guests join in and react to the *affect* of the song, not its linguistic meaning. As Thomas Mann writes, 'a wave of *objectless and merely self-propagating merriment* swept over the terrace'.[38] What Aschenbach responds to, then, is the combined affect of the sinister song and the overwhelming group laughter, which is at once 'facile' and threatening. To underline his status as 'victim', he meets their musical-laughter with silence. Furthermore, his muteness symbolises his alliance with Tadzio, the cause of his alienation. Thus, a moment of frivolity reveals a painful and humiliating subtext, an exaggeration of Verdi's jocular macabre. Moreover, the laughing chorus may also, paradoxically, be understood as a *concertato*. Although the chorus sing the same musical phrases, unlike Verdi's *concertato* in *La traviata* with its complex and contradictory vocal layers, their understanding of the *meaning* of these phrases is starkly polarised.

Aschenbach, like Alfredo, is also aware of his own fate. At the card table Alfredo observes: *'Sfortuna nell'amore fortuna reca al giuoco'* ('bad luck in love is always good fortune for the gambler!').[39] By continuing to gamble and exploit his luck, he seals his fate as a tragically unlucky lover. Similarly, death is the subject of Aschenbach's recitative after the exit of the Players: 'So the moments pass; and as they dwindle through the fragile neck dividing life from death I see them flow as once I saw the thread of sand slip through my father's hour-glass'.[40] (The return of the father symbolism suggests the continuing emotional resonance of the Leader's mocking song.) Arguably, this is the moment at which Aschenbach begins to recognise, acquiesce in and even hasten his own destruction. Only shortly afterwards

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[37] *Ibid.*, p. 208.
[38] My italics. *Ibid.*, p. 254.
[39] Giuseppe Verdi, *La traviata*, p. 147
[40] Benjamin Britten, *Death in Venice*, p. 215.

he agrees to wear the gaudy clothes and cosmetics provided by the Barber, impersonating the death archetype by dressing as the Old Fop.

5. 'The Dream'

Thirdly, 'The Dream' scene, which focuses the central conflict of the work, loosely alludes to Verdian sleep-walking (*sonnambulismo*) and mad-scenes, such as Lady Macbeth's night-wanderings in *Macbeth*, act IV scene 2.[41] In Aschenbach's dream, however, mythological archetypes play out his 'inner' conflict, a sign that his dilemma is more Platonic than historic. The voices of Apollo and Dionysus and the orchestral interjections that punctuate their discourse reflect the fragmentary scales and uncanny flourishes that characterise Verdian dream-utterance. Moreover, as in *Macbeth*, the eruption of the unconscious marks the turning-point of the drama, the moment at which Aschenbach's destruction becomes inevitable.

The wordless-chorus that describes the orgiastic frenzy of the closing stages of the dream also parallels the wordless storm-scene in *Rigoletto* act IV no. 17. The inarticulate cries of the Bacchic worshippers both foreshadow Aschenbach's demise and recall his earlier blurred aural perceptions of Tadzio's name on the beach; the past and the future are crystallised into one moment. Thus, an effect associated with 'outer' pathetic fallacy in Verdi's opera (the tempestuous storm intensifying the mounting tragedy) becomes associated with 'inner' psychological conflict, a sign that we are once again sharing Aschenbach's perceptions. The wordless-chorus effect also recalls the closing moments of *Aïda* (act IV), where the vowel-painting emphasises the otherworldliness and spirituality of the scene. Moreover, it is the sound of this devotional chant, in both Verdi's and Britten's scores, that heralds death, but also supplies the ambiguous promise of spiritual redemption.

When the Traveller commands Aschenbach to 'go South', then, the ensuing Mediterranean journey is mental as well as physical; it involves self-discovery, reflection and invention as well as observation. Similarly, Britten's music traces a complex path beyond the Alps, embracing characteristically Venetian sounds, a split

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[41] *Ibid.*, pp. 229-236.

Verdian *tinta*, and allusions to, and parody subversions of, Verdian operatic genres. His creative journey is full of ambiguity and multiple associations, and his invention of Venice, abounding in Italianate musical resonances, is one that invites fruitfully multivalent interpretations. And it is highly synthetic. Thirty years before, Britten pronounced his intention in his vocal writing to 'answer Nietzsche's call to Mediterraneanize music'.[42] *Death in Venice* is his last and, arguably, most sophisticated answer.

[42] Christopher Headington, *Peter Pears: A Biography*, p. 230.

Afterword

Britten as a 'Conservative Revolutionary'[1]

There has been much critical anxiety over how to place Britten's music in the twentieth-century modernist context, due to its apparent conservatism. According to Brett, this was still perceived as an obstacle to serious consideration of his music in 1981: 'It will take some time for the dust of such irrelevant questions as his "conservatism" to settle before we can see what the really critical issues are'.[2] This claim resonates with the notion that British composers reacted to modernism later than their Continental counterparts.[3] As Whittall explains, 'suspicion of the extravagant, the expressionistic, the experimental ... dictated the course of British music's mainstream until the 1960s'.[4] The allusions to Verdi in Britten's works revealed in the preceding chapters, ranging from dramatic pacing and stage craft, 'number' structures, vocal line construction and generic scenes to popular song, may be interpreted as a substantiation of this claim of conservatism. Yet, his self-critical, playful and subversive manipulations of these allusions suggest something more. Britten's intertextual play with musical language means that his works combine modernist innovation with 'accessibility'; that, in Einstein's words, he was a part of a 'rare species [of] conservative revolutionaries, or ... revolutionary conservatives'.[5]

Britten's musical relationship with Verdi acts as a pivot, in this respect. On one hand, he embraced elements of his predecessor's style, leading to some conservatism

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[1] Einstein, quoted in: Hans Keller, 'Britten and Mozart', p.172.
[2] Philip Brett, Review, *Notes*, 1981, pp. 577-578, quoted in Jenny Doctor, 'Afterwards', Philip Brett, *Music and Sexuality in Britten*, p. 241. 'By the modernist tenets that are still quite powerfully held in many quarters he was woefully conservative – I could barely mention his name to my composing colleagues in California when I first arrived there in the sixties.' Philip Brett, Review, *Journal of the Royal Musicological Association*, p. 151, quoted in: *Ibid.*, p. 241.
[3] Arnold Whittall, 'British Music in the Modern World', *Music in Britain: The Twentieth Century*, ed. Stephen Banfield, Oxford, Blackwell, 1995, p. 9.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 17.
[5] Einstein, quoted in: Hans Keller, 'Britten and Mozart', p.172.

within his historical circumstance. On the other, he used allusion self-consciously, subjecting his models to transformation, parody and subversion, demonstrating a more revolutionary approach. (With Taruskin's critique in mind, my use of the terms 'conservative' and 'revolutionary', here, is intended to elucidate Britten's relationship with his models without invoking political associations or value judgements.)[6] By viewing the transformation of established forms as an essential part of modernism, this argument resonates with Whittall's placement of Britten's music between the 'avant-garde' and the 'conservative'[7] and the recent work of J. P. E. Harper-Scott, whose study of Edward Elgar interprets his music as modernist on the basis of his manipulation of traditional elements rather than the development of a radically new musical language.[8] It is beyond the scope of this concluding chapter to deal in detail with this complex and thorny subject, but the aim is to sketch out a broad outline of how consideration of the Verdian resonances in Britten's work and his wider engagement with past material may enrich our understanding of just how 'modernist' his music is.

1. Britten as 'Conservative'

As Jenny Doctor observes, a full assessment of Britten's relationship with tonality has been later to come 'out of the closet' than his sexuality.[9] This is a significant factor in the critical anxiety over his position within the twentieth century and is underlined by the fact that, in general, consideration of the tonal background of his musical language has been given less emphasis than references to extended-tonal and atonal elements. This omission suggests a lingering scholarly concern over how to define Britten's music as both progressive *and* rooted in tonality. Yet, the composer unashamedly embraced extended tonality rather than serialism, observing in 1963:

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[6] Taruskin challenges the legitimacy of such terms as 'conservative' and 'revolutionary' in historical narrative, arguing that they are value-laden and that their use betrays a wider bias towards the Germanic in musicological writing. Richard Taruskin, 'Speed Bumps', Review, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, vol. 29, No. 2, 2005, pp. 189-190.
[7] Arnold Whittall, 'Individualism and Accessibility: The Moderate Mainstream, 1945-75', *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Music*, ed. Nicholas Cook and Anthony Pople, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 364-394.
[8] Harper-Scott, J. P. E. *Edward Elgar, Modernist*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006.
[9] Jenny Doctor, 'Afterwards', p. 241.

> [Twelve-tone composition] has simply never attracted me as a method, though I respect many composers who have worked in it, and love some of their works. It is beyond me to say why, except that I cannot feel that tonality is outworn, and find many serial "rules" arbitrary. "Socially" I am seriously disturbed by its limitations. I can see it taking no part in the music-lover's music-making. Its method makes writing *gratefully* for voices or instruments an impossibility, which inhibits amateurs and children.[10]

In Harry White's terms, then, we may understand Britten's music as part of 'the re-emancipation of tonality' in the wake of the 'emancipation of dissonance'.[11] Indeed, White goes on to 'recognise [tonality] as the fundamental medium for Britten's musico-dramatic exploration[s] ... to the point at which a continuity between Britten's audible structures and tonal language and those of nineteenth-century opera becomes indispensable to an understanding of his work.'[12] However, crucially, he does not see this as precluding modernism.

As we have seen, particularly in the chapter on *Billy Budd*, tonality, both as a large-scale shaping device and as an agent of dramatic symbolism, is central to Britten's conception of opera. It is, however, mediated – often more on the surface – by the layering of simultaneous tonalities, tritonal organisation and modality. With this tonal underpinning many generic allusions to Verdian 'number' opera and the wider Italian tradition emerge. Indeed, tonal direction frequently reinforces structural divisions. In *Peter Grimes*, generic scenes form the building blocks of the action, so, too, in *Billy Budd*, where generic scenes, set-pieces and choruses shape the work's entire structure. Further, *Gloriana* clearly alludes to 'number' opera precedents and also Grand Opera conventions, through its stage spectacle, the use of recurring chorus themes and its rich 'English' *tinta*. Thus, in the moments in which Britten most openly 'assimilates' past material and subtly transforms it – especially in the works written as public statements – there emerges what may be considered a bias towards conservatism, a sense of Britten manipulating operatic language from *within*.

To return to Britten's words about serialism, his emphasis on the importance of the appeal of his music to 'music-lover' and the 'amateur' reveals his belief in a

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[10] Benjamin Britten, 'Composers in Interview' (1963), *Britten on Music*, p. 229.
[11] Harry White, 'The Holy Commandments of Tonality', p. 255.
[12] *Ibid.*, p. 262.

strong link between tonality (or extended tonality) and popularity. Much of his music is openly aimed at entertainment, designed to please his Aldeburgh audiences as well as young musicians. Lennox Berkeley, too, noted that many of Britten's works are 'light' and aimed to appeal to 'uneducated' listeners.

> One of the most remarkable things about all Britten's music is that it is far more accessible to the ordinary listener than is the work of most contemporary composers … He is profoundly traditional, and his music, though intensely individual, is easily connected with what has gone before.[13]

After commenting as we may expect on Britten's folk song settings, the Catalan Dances in *Mont Juic* (on which Britten and Berkeley collaborated), the Rossini arrangements, *Night Mail* and the *Little Sweep* he, less expectedly, claims that *Albert Herring* is a continuation of this trend. Berkeley highlights not only the opera's comic aspects, but suggests that in his terms the music itself is 'light'.[14] He later observes that 'in so much contemporary music the composer's technique seems an end in itself (perhaps because there is so little else to admire), but here it is unobtrusive'.[15] (As we have seen, however, *Albert Herring* is also rife with parody, which points to a more self-conscious play with musical meaning.) The true motivations for Britten's stance are unclear, however, as Whittall notes: 'It is difficult to prove that the relative accessibility of his music was more the result of social conscience than of "selfish" aesthetic predilections'.[16] The issue is further clouded by the fact that in his writings and interviews Britten appeared to want to distance himself from overtly popular genres – displaying an ambivalence towards jazz, which he saw as a descendent of Donizetti.[17] Nevertheless, there appears to have been a tension between his wish to communicate with a wide audience and at the same time write serious music.

Furthermore, communication of serious political and social issues to a large public both in concert – especially through the formation of the English Opera Group

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[13] Lennox Berkeley, 'The Light Music', *Benjamin Britten: A Commentary on his works from a group of specialists*, ed. Donald Mitchell and Hans Keller, London, Rockliff, 1952, p. 287.
[14] 'Music may be called light which does not require, on the part of the listener, any previous education in taste or knowledge, but that can be immediately enjoyed even by those who do not regard themselves as musical in the usual sense of the word.' Lennox Berkeley, 'The Light Music', p. 287.
[15] *Ibid.*, p. 292.
[16] Arnold Whittall, 'Individualism and Accessibility: The Moderate Mainstream, 1945-75', p. 382.
[17] Benjamin Britten, 'England and the Folk-Art Problem' (1941), *Britten on Music*, p. 32.

and the Aldeburgh Festival – and through other media – film, radio and later television – was central to Britten's project. He used his connections with publishers (OUP, Faber & Faber and Boosey & Hawkes) and cultural institutions (the BBC, the Arts Council, Sadler's Wells and Covent Garden) to promote his music and engage with the public.[18] And his message, though frequently veiled, was concerned with pressing social issues: pacifism, sexuality and injustice.[19] Britten's use of the popular was thus coupled with serious artistic intent.

Verdi's music, too, embraces popular elements and was written with entertainment very much in mind. His creativity was largely bound up with the economics of the opera houses. Fabrizio Della Seta underlines the impact of performance circumstances – staging requirements, the demands of singers, and the need for a quick turn-over of new works – on the production and reception of his operas.[20] Moreover, the popular qualities of Verdi's music contribute to Isaiah Berlin's formulation of him as a 'naïve'[21] artist, which draws on Schiller's differentiation between naïve and sentimental art. Berlin argues that he 'is always in touch with popular forms', remarking that in *Aïda* 'it is simply not a relevant complaint that the triumphal march could be a large-scale offering by the Busseto town band'.[22] However, other aspects of Verdi's character and works highlighted by Berlin in order to substantiate his thesis are more contentious. He suggests that Verdi used 'conventions' unquestioningly[23] – without taking into account his manipulations of form, particularly in the late works – and that historical considerations, despite his *Risorgimento* allegiances, take an insignificant part in his works[24] – without taking into account the 'political' dimensions of his plots. While his observations are exaggerated, however, they do underline the Italian composer's connection with the popular, the direct. There is thus some similarity between the popular and social

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[18] Paul Kildea, *Selling Britten*, p. 12.
[19] *Ibid.*, p. 7. Indeed, both Whittall's and Taruskin's placement of Britten within twentieth-century music history stress his social engagement, despite other considerable divergences. Arnold Whittall, 'Individualism and Accessibility: The Moderate Mainstream, 1945-75', pp. 364-394; Richard Taruskin, 'Music in Society: Britten', *The Oxford History of Western Music*, Vol. 5, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005, pp. 221-260.
[20] Fabrizio Della Seta, 'Some Difficulties in the Historiography of Italian Opera', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, Vol. 10, No. 1, 1998, p. 3.
[21] Isaiah Berlin, 'The Naiveté of Verdi', *The Verdi Companion*, pp. 1-12.
[22] Isaiah Berlin, quoted in: Bernard Williams, *On Opera*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2006, p. 138.
[23] Isaiah Berlin, 'The Naiveté of Verdi', p. 3.
[24] *Ibid.*, p. 6.

engagement of both Verdi and Britten, though Britten's commitment to politics and social comment was more subtle and far-reaching than Verdi's.

As discussed in the preceding chapters, Britten absorbs Verdian popular/naïve diction in a variety of ways. His use of popular song, often alluding to Verdi's diegetic music, emerges most strongly in the drinking song in *Peter Grimes*, the children's songs in *Albert Herring*, the sea shanties in *Billy Budd*, the children's rhymes in *The Turn of the Screw*, and the vernacular Italian songs in *Death in Venice*. Yet, Britten frequently challenges the apparent simplicity of this utterance. The sea songs in act I reveal both the '*individuality* and accessibility of *Grimes*'[25] as Whittall suggests. Furthermore, Britten's allusions to established operatic forms add to the directness and immediate 'comprehensibility' of his works.

The tension between serious and popular music, which looms large in Britten (and Verdi) scholarship, strikes at the heart of the debate over twentieth-century modernism. Popularity in performance in the first half of the twentieth century was frequently understood as a sign of a *lack* of modernity.[26] The 'elitism' of the avant-garde, emphasising radical newness, meant that a warm reception was seen as a sign of artistic compromise. In a characteristically Marxist formulation, Charles Baxter proposes that modernism positioned itself 'as the dialectically opposed shadow-self of the commercial market'.[27] There was a strong tension between 'progress', defined as a continuation of the Second Viennese school through the avant-garde, and art's function within society as 'entertainment':

> The several music movements, which had self-consciously broken with the past and attempted to achieve novel forms of expression, were entangled in a struggle between two seemingly irreconcilable forces. The artistic imperative to follow one's own vision clashed with the need to avoid extremes if the waverers in the audience were to be won over.[28]

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[25] Arnold Whittall, 'Individualism and Accessibility: The Moderate Mainstream, 1945-75', p. 381.
[26] Nicholas E. Tawa, *A Most Wondrous Babble: American Art Composers, their Music and the American Scene 1950-1985*, New York, Greenwood Press, 1987, p. 20.
[27] Charles Baxter, 'Assaulting the Audience in Modernism', *Modernism: Challenges and Perspectives*, ed. Monique Chefdor, Ricardo Quinones, Albert Wachtel, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1986, p. 274.
[28] Nicholas Tawa, *A Most Wondrous Babble*, p. 29.

Schoenberg's famous quotation is pertinent here: 'If it is art, it is not for all; and if it is for all, it is not art'.[29] Adorno's writings on 'popular' music compound this rift.[30] However, Britten's music is highly 'self-reflective' *as well as* leaning towards the popular and the conservative.

2. Britten as 'Revolutionary'

Brett asserts that 'Britten never wanted to hide behind a cloud of abstract modernism or avant-garde ideas'.[31] The strong presence of folk-song and allusions to the English choral tradition in his music, as well as the Verdian allusions suggested above, underline the point.[32] However, by expanding the idea of modernism in line with recent musicological trends, his music may be understood as modernist through his *use* of past materials.

The theorisation of modern music has been significantly shaped by Adorno's polarisation of the works of Schoenberg and Stravinsky, with Schoenberg emerging as triumphantly modernist.[33] As Alistair Williams observes, 'Adorno was, of course, damning of neoclassicism and tells us that polystylism and intertextuality are risky strategies with a capacity for spectacular failure.'[34] (Britten, too, as we shall see below, indulges in such 'polystylism' and may thus be aligned loosely with this side of the debate.) Significantly, Adorno's views were echoed in British music reception in the early twentieth century.[35]

However, this binary division is far from stable, and Whittall usefully emphasises the possibility of viewing the 'dialogue between "expressionism" and "neoclassicism" as opposite sides of the same modernist coin'.[36] Williams, too, suggests that modernity is emerging as a movement with *two* trends, both towards the invention of

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[29] Arnold Schoenberg, *Style and Idea*, ed. Leonard Stein, New York, St Martin's Press, 1975, p. 124.
[30] Max Paddison, *Adorno, Modernism and Mass Culture: Essays on Critical Theory and Music*, London, Kahn & Averill, 2004, p. 86.
[31] Philip Brett, *Music and Sexuality in Britten*, p. 205.
[32] Philip Brett, '"Keeping the Straight Line Intact?" Britten's Relation to Folksong, Purcell, and His English Predecessors', *Music and Sexuality in Britten*, pp. 154-171.
[33] Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music*.
[34] Alastair Williams, 'Adorno and the Semantics of Modernism', *Perspectives of New Music*, Vol. 37, No. 2, 1999, p. 40.
[35] Richard Middleton, 'The "Problem" of Popular Music', p. 34.
[36] Arnold Whittall, *Exploring Twentieth-century Music*, p. 187.

a 'new' musical language via the Second Viennese school and then the avant-garde and Darmstadt, and towards the transformation of past material, symbolised by Stravinsky's Neo-Classicism.[37] In light of this, we may read Britten's invocation of Verdi (and a myriad of other influences) as a justification rather than a compromise of his place in the expanded modernist landscape. Indeed, the similarity of Britten and Stravinsky's aesthetic aims may well have been additional factors in their increasingly tense relationship. Thus, the play of ideas and the self-reflexivity of his musical dialogue with others underline the modernist impulse. This is also an aspect of Mahler's work that Adorno *praised*.[38]

Recent formulations defining musical modernism thus emphasise its plurality and encompass the re-use of past materials.[39] As Williams puts it:

> Current interest in musical identities alerts us to the multiple strands of modernity, many of which were repressed by a particular brand of high modernism. The post-war emphasis on technique and construction … brackets out many components that contribute to musical subjectivity … and in doing so creates an idiosyncratic reception history of modernism, valued more for its technical advancement than its cultural resources.[40]

It is the application of post-modern thought that reveals the multiple strands of modernism. Robert Morgan similarly observes that 'musical modernism is marked, above all, by its "linguistic plurality" and by the failure of any one language to assume a dominant position'.[41]

Underlining the tension between old and new in Britten's works, Whittall proposes that they may be placed between the 'avant-garde' and the 'conservative', in a middle ground, which he terms the 'moderate mainstream'.[42] Like Shostakovich's, Britten's use of tonality and tradition, mediated by transformation, means that he walks a tightrope between accessibility and innovation. As Holloway underlines:

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[37] Alistair Williams, 'Adorno and the Semantics of Modernism', p. 32.
[38] *Ibid.*, p. 41.
[39] Ricarda Quinones, 'From Resistance to Reassessment', *Modernism: Challenges and Perspectives*, p. 8.
[40] Alistair Williams, 'Adorno and the Semantics of Modernism', p. 43.
[41] Robert P. Morgan, 'Secret Languages: The Roots of Musical Modernism', *Modernism: Challenges and Perspectives*, p. 34.
[42] Arnold Whittall, 'Individualism and Accessibility', pp. 364-394.

> This music has the power to connect the avant-garde with the lost paradise of tonality; it conserves and renovates in the boldest and simplest manner; it shows how old usages can be refreshed and remade, and how the new can be saved from mere rootlessness, etoliation, lack of connexion and communication.[43]

It is this view that may be extended to embrace Britten's relationship with Verdi. As shown above, Britten uses tonal organisation and alludes to the operatic structures of Verdi, while also transforming them.

In Taruskin's opinion, however, Britten's modernity may be defined in a very different way: he identifies Britten's technique of tonal layering as an important claim to modernism, through its links with surrealism. He notes the 'idiosyncratic or extraordinary presentations of material that [are] part of every listener's ordinary musical experience associated with surrealism' and suggests that the 'association ... characterise[s] Britten's brand of modernism, which is ... given to "polytonal" effects'.[44] Such layering occurs frequently in Britten's works and is often signalled by 'wrongness ... [where the] composer dislocates and miscontextualises'[45] musical elements. The bitonal stratification at the opening of *Billy Budd* is a case in point.[46] Further, as we saw in the chapter on *The Turn of the Screw*, Britten frequently makes a deliberate feature of such layering and 'miscontextualisation'. Yet, I would argue that the resulting 'strangeness' is not derived from a serious engagement with the surrealist aesthetic, or solely from his use of tonal layering, but rather from an eclectic intertextuality; one that points to a Neo-Romantic/Neo-Classical relationship with the past, as well as invoking world music. He creates uncanny resonances through the eclectic mingling and non-synthesis of his allusions, where Verdi becomes one of a wide range of 'competing' influences, together with Perotin, Mozart, Stravinsky and Balinese Gamelan. Although layering is prominent in Britten's works, it occupies a fairly marginal place within his range of 'transformational' techniques.

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[43] Robin Holloway, 'Benjamin Britten 1913-1976', *Tempo*, No. 120, 1977, p. 6.
[44] Richard Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music*, p. 250.
[45] Daniel Albright, *Modernism and Music: An Anthology of Sources*, p. 331.
[46] Philip Rupprecht, 'Tonal Stratification and Uncertainty in Britten's Music', pp. 311-346.

The preceding analysis of Verdian allusions reveals that Britten's modernism emerges most clearly in the comic and openly subversive works. Firstly, in *Albert Herring*, Britten alludes to Verdi's comic devices (derived from *Falstaff*) – genre allusion – while simultaneously expanding his use of diegetic music, particularly through the self-reflexivity of the rehearsal of the children's May Day song. This rising self-consciousness extends to a parody of Wagner, through a direct quotation of the 'love potion' theme from *Tristan*, and to caricature of Britten's Italian models through the comic utterance of the Mayor. Thus, Verdi becomes a figure of fun, here, as well as providing techniques of operatic humour. Secondly, the comic techniques present in *Albert Herring* are magnified and distorted in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The meta-opera in particular allows Britten to engage in critical play with the conventions of Italian opera, especially the works of Donizetti, but also Verdi. Parody comes close to ridicule, here, as well as homage. Thirdly, in the *War Requiem*, Verdian allusions are subverted in an intertextual context, which involves a powerful clash between the sacred and secular genres and conveys a strongly pacifist message.

Yet, the other works analysed here also display modernist tendencies. In the 'Grand Operas', tonal and generic allusion is coupled with challenge, for example the transformations of the generic scenes in *Peter Grimes* (notably the sinister connotations of the laughing chorus, and the gender ambiguity surrounding Peter's mad scene), the split set-piece forms and generic subversions in *Billy Budd*, the complex 'nationalist' implications of the Neo-Elizabethan *tinta* in *Gloriana*. *The Turn of the Screw* and *Death in Venice* appear as the most highly synthetic of Britten's works, alluding to a myriad of other composers and even the techniques of serialism. Here, too, the Verdian is transformed, notably through the distortions of Verdian arch structures in the former and the extension of *tinta* techniques and the grotesque parody of popular song in the latter. When viewing Britten's works in chronological order, it is tempting to suggest that there is a progression from a tendency towards 'assimilation' in the earlier works towards more obvious challenge and subversion in the later ones. A shift in emphasis is evident, but it is not nearly so simple, as Verdian allusions are 'assimilated' later (for example the generic modelling in *Death in Venice*), and transformed and parodied earlier (for example the comic utterance of the Mayor in *Albert Herring*).

Thus, as a result of his self-critical use of past materials, Britten is revealed as very much a product of his time. He is less 'radical' than Stravinsky, but his music does share a passionate engagement with historical models.[47] And the sophisticated transformations and self-consciousness with which he uses his Verdian allusions is an essential part of this. His music draws on references to Verdi, but also to Mozart, Berg, Mahler and many others. (A study of the full extent of his stylistic 'synthesis' has yet to be undertaken.) In relation to this, Martha Hyde's formulation is extremely useful. She identifies the 'eclectic mingling'[48] in Stravinsky's music, where 'tradition becomes a warehouse whose contents can be re-arranged and plundered without damage or responsibility'.[49] This resonates powerfully with Britten's own description of his tendency to move bee-like from flower to flower for his models, and may equally be applied to a wider 'past' than that of Classicism. (The ways in which he manipulates these models, as we have seen, though, is very different.) Verdi thus appears as an important strand in his *synthetic* invocation of the past. His emphasis on synthesising a multiplicity of historical gestures into his own voice appears to be central to his modernism, revealing a critical and complex relationship with musical tradition. Perhaps we are now ready to 'see what the really critical issues are'.[50]

Britten's allusions are far from weak and passive gestures, but involve complex and very *active* re-invention: the link with the past is not something that pulls him backwards, but propels him forwards. Just as the co-existence of 'conservatism' and 'revolution' characterises Britten's particular type of modernism, we may view his complex relationship with other music, and in particular Verdi's music, as part of his very individual musical character. His uniqueness is, paradoxically, underlined by his manipulation and appropriation of pre-existing works. He claimed that he could not compose 'alone' and, arguably, his most distinctive musical voice emerges precisely through a dialogue with musical 'others'.

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[47] Daniel Albright, *Modernism and Music*, p. 194.
[48] Martha M. Hyde, 'Neoclassic and Anachronistic Impulses in Twentieth-Century Music', *Music Theory Spectrum*, Vol. 18, No. 2, 1996, p. 211.
[49] *Ibid.*, p. 211.
[50] Philip Brett, Review, *Notes*, 1981, pp. 577-578, quoted in Jenny Doctor, 'Afterwards', p. 241.

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Verdi, Giuseppe. *Requiem*, ed. Michael Pilkington, London, Novello, 1993.

Verdi, Giuseppe. *Rigoletto*, trans. Ruth and Thomas Martin, New York, G. Schirmer, 1957.

Verdi, Giuseppe. *Simon Boccanegra*, Roma, Ricordi, 1963.

Verdi, Giuseppe. *La traviata*, trans. Ruth and Thomas Martin, New York, G. Schirmer, 1961.

Verdi, Giuseppe. *Il trovatore*, trans. Natalia Macfarren, New York, G. Schirmer, 1926.

Appendix I

Britten's and Pears's Verdi Scores

(BB = Benjamin Britten, PP = Peter Pears, TR = Terence Reeves, JC = Joan Cross, RS = Rosamund Strode, DB = David Brynley, NN = Norman Notley, LS = Lillian Southgate)

Grand Opera Arias (tenor), including pieces by Verdi, Donizetti, Ponchielli and Puccini	PP	1928	
Aïda: opera in quattro atti		1913	'Boosey & Hawkes Ltd.'
Ave Maria	PP	1946	
Un ballo in maschera	PP	n. d.	
Un ballo in maschera	PP	1944	
Don Carlo: dramma lirico		1945	
Don Carlo: opera in cinque atti		n. d.	
I due Foscari: tragedia lirica in 3 atti	PP	1950	
Ernani	PP	n. d.	
Falstaff	BB	1951	'For Ben's birthday – and "Billy Budd's" With love, Marion, George [Harewood] Nov. 22nd – Dec. 1st 1951'

Falstaff: Lyrical Comedy in Three Acts	BB	1893	'To my dear Ben – for my birthday - with love – P.'
Falstaff – Atto II Duetto 'Labbra di foco'	PP	1893	
Il finto Stanislao: melodramma giocoso in 2 atti	PP	1951	BB
Il finto Stanislao – Act I Terzetto 'Un giorno di regno'	PP	n.d.	
La forza del destino: melodramma in quattro atti	PP	n.d.	PP
La forza del destino – Duetto 'Ah per sempre, o mio bell'angelo'	PP	n. d.	
La forza del destino – 'O tu, che in seno agli angeli'	PP	1945	With annotated program for a recital by PP, JC and Peter Gellhorn at Cambridge Guildhall 11 February 1951
Giovanna d'Arco: dramma lirico in un prologo e 3 atti	PP	1950	
Lusia Miller: melodramma tragico in tre atti		1863	

Luisa Miller: melodramma tragico in tre atti	PP	1944	Section of score written in PP's hand	
Macbeth: melodramma in quattro atti	PP	n. d.		PP
I masnadieri – 'Qual mare, qual terra'	PP	1870	'Hutchings & Romer March 1873'	
Messa da Requiem: Für 4 Solostimmen, gemischten Chor und Orchester (m. s.)	BB	n.d.	'Benjamin Britten. Wien, Nov. 1934'	
Nabucco – 'Coro di schiavi ebrei' (v. s.)		n. d.		
Nabucodonosor		n. d.		
Nabucodonosor – 'Oh dischiuso è il firmamento'		n.d.		
Otello: dramma lirico in 4 atti	PP	n. d.		
Otello: dramma lirico in quattro atti	BB	1913		BB
Otello – 'Assisa a piè d'un salice'		n.d.		
Otello: Morte di Otello (Death of Othello)	PP	1926		PP

Pater noster: volgarizzato da Dante	PP	1945		
Quartett: E moll	BB	n. d.		
Quartett: E moll		1932	'Gift of Mary Jackson'	
Rigoletto: Opera in Three Acts	BB	n. d.	'Benjamin Britten 1938'	
Rigoletto – 'La donna è mobile' *Ricordi's Caruso Album of Songs and Arias: In Keys of Medium Range*	PP	1909		
Rigoletto – 'Scena ed Aria Atto Secondo'	PP	n. d.	trans. by PP	PP
Simon Boccanegra: melodramma in un prologo e tre atti	BB	1948		BB
Stabat Mater: For Chorus and Orchestra	PP	1913		
Te Deum: per doppio coro a 4 voci miste ed orchestra	PP	1898		
La traviata *Sopran-Album aus dem Repertoire Irmgard Seefried: 19 Arien und Lieder; Szene und Arie der Violetta: aus der Oper*		1949	'München 1952'	

"La traviata"

La traviata: An Opera in Three Acts	BB	n. d.	'Benjamin Britten'	
La traviata: A Lyric Drama in Three Acts	PP	n. d.		PP
Il trovatore: Opera in 4 Acten	PP	n.d.	'Peter Pears/December 1932'	PP
Il trovatore – The Miserere Scene (v. s.)	PP	n.d.		
Il trovatore – 'Strida la vampa'		n. d.		
Il trovatore – The Troubadour's Song 'Ah! Che la morte!'	BB	n. d.	(Britten's family collection)	

Appendix II

Britten's and Pears's Donizetti Scores

Anna Bolena – 'Deh! Non voler constringere'		n. d.	
Anna Bolena – 'Deh! Non voler constringere' *The Contralto Album: A Collection of 50 Celebrated Songs for Mezzo-Soprano and Contralto Voices Extracted from the Most Famous Operas*	[DB/ NN]	n. d.	
Il Castello di Kenilworth – 'Ti riveggo, Fanny', 'Par che mi dica ancora' *The Prima Donna's Album: A Collection of 46 Celebrated Cavatinas and Arias Extracted from the Principal Modern Operas*	[JC]	n. d.	'To dear Joan kindest wishes always/ Bole/ August 30/ 42.'
Il Castello di Kenilworth – 'Ti riveggo, Fanny', 'Par che mi dica ancora' *The Prima Donna's Album*	[RS]	n. d.	'August 1955'
Don Pasquale: Komische Oper in 3 Acten	[PP]	n.d	BB

Dom Sebastien: grand opera en 5 actes		n. d.		
L'Elisire d'amore – 'Prendi per me sei libero' *The Contralto Album*	[DB/ NN]	n. d.		
La favorita		n. d.		
La figlia del reggimento – 'Ciascun lo dice' *The Prima Donna's Album*	[JC]	n.d.	'To dear Joan kindest wishes always/ Bole/ August 30/ 42.'	
La figlia del reggimento – 'Ciascun lo dice' *The Prima Donna's Album*	[RS]	n.d.	'August 1955'	
La figlia del reggimento – Romanza 'Convien partir'		n.d.		
La favorita – 'Favorita del re!'	[PP]	1909		PP
La favorita – 'Fia dunque vero' and 'O mio Ferando' *The Prima Donna's Album*	[JC]	n. d.	'To dear Joan kindest wishes always/ Bole/ August 30/ 42.'	
La favorita – 'Fia dunque vero' and 'O mio Ferando' *The Prima Donna's Album*	[RS]	n. d.	'August 1955'	
La favorita – 'O mio Fernando'		n.d.		

The Daughter of the Regiment	[TR]	1928	Libretto for broadcast 9/11 July 1928
Gianni di Parigi – 'Mira, o bella, il trovatore'		n. d.	
Gianni di Parigi – 'Mira, o bella, il trovatore' *The Contralto Album*	[DB/ NN]	n. d.	
Linda di Chamounix – 'Cari luoghi ov'io passai'		n. d.	
Linda di Chamounix – 'Cari luoghi ov'io passai' *The Contralto Album*		n. d.	
Linda di Chamounix – 'O luce di quest'anima' *The Prima Donna's Album*	[JC]	n. d.	'To dear Joan kindest wishes always/ Bole/ August 30/ 42.'
Linda di Chamounix – 'O luce di quest'anima' *The Prima Donna's Album*	[RS]	n.d.	
Linda di Chamounix – 'Per sua madre andò una figlia' *The Contralto Album*	[DB/ NN]	n. d.	
Lucia di Lammermoor – 'Regnava nel silenzio' *The Prima Donna's Album*	[JC]	n. d.	'To dear Joan kindest wishes always/ Bole/ August 30/ 42.'

Lucia di Lammermoor – 'Regnava nel silenzio' *The Prima Donna's Album*	[RS]	n. d.	'August 1955'
Lucrezia Borgia: Opera in Two Acts and a Prologue		n.d.	
Lucrezia Borgia – 'Com' è bello' *The Prima Donna's Album*	[JC]	n.d.	'To dear Joan kindest wishes always/ Bole/ August 30/ 42.'
Lucrezia Borgia – 'Com' è bello' *The Prima Donna's Album*	[RS]	n.d.	'August 1955'
Lucrezia Borgia – 'Nella fatal di rimini'		n. d.	
Lucrezia Borgia – 'Il segreto per esser felici'		n. d.	
Lucrezia Borgia – 'Il segreto per esser felici' *The Contralto Album*	[DB/ NN]	n. d.	
Lucrezia Borgia – 'Di pescatore' *Favourite Songs and Duets from Celebrated Operas*	[LS]	n. d.	
Lucrezia Borgia – 'Lo! Heavenly beauty!'	[LS]	n. d.	

Favourite songs and duets from celebrated operas			
Maria de Rohan – 'Son leggero è ver d'amore' *The Contralto Album*	[DB/ NN]	n. d.	
Der Liebestrank, Romanze des Nemorino *Arien-Album: Sammlung berühmter Arien für eine Tenorstimme mit Pianofortebegleitung*	[DB/ NN]	n.d.	'Frank Buckley/ 1897/ Dresden'
La regina di Golconda – 'Che val ricchezza et trono' *The Contralto Album*	[DB/ NN]	n. d.	
Torquato Tasso – 'Fatal Goffredo!' and 'Io l'udia ne' suoi bei carmi' *The Contralto Album*	[DB/ NN]	n. d.	
Ugo conte di Parigi – 'Prova mi dai, lo sento' *The Contralto Album*	[DB/ NN]	n. d.	

Appendix III

Britten's and Pears's Rossini Scores

Suite from La boutique Fantastique: Ballet in One Act		1919	
Il barbiere di Siviglia (v. s.)	PP	1901	PP
Il barbiere di Siviglia: An Opera in Two Acts (study score)		n. d.	'Peter Pears/Wimbledon' 'P. P.'
Il barbiere di Siviglia: Opera in Two Acts (v. s.)	PP	n.d.	
Der Barbier von Sevilla – Overture (m.s.)		n.d.	
The Barber of Seville – Libretto	TR	1926	Libretto for broadcast 10 December 1926
Il barbiere di Siviglia – Atto I Duetto 'All'idea di quel metallo'	PP	1947	
Sopran-Album aus dem Repertoire Irmgard Seefried: 19 Arien und Lieder: Cavatine der Rosine aus der Oper 'Der Barbier von Sevilla'		1949	'Ingeborg/ München 1952'

Il barbiere di Siviglia – 'Il vecchietto cerca moglie' *The Contralto Album*	DB/ NN	n.d.	
Il barbiere di Siviglia – 'Una voce poco fâ' *The Prima Donna's Album*	JC	n. d.	'To dear Joan kindest wishes always/ Bole/ August 30/ 42.'
Il barbiere di Siviglia – 'Una voce poco fâ' *The Prima Donna's Album*	RS	n.d.	'August 1955'
Bianca e Falliero – 'Come sereno è il dì', 'Della rosa il bel vermiglio' *The Prima Donna's Album*	JC	n. d.	'To dear Joan kindest wishes always/ Bole/ August 30/ 42.'
Bianca e Falliero – 'Come sereno è il dì', 'Della rosa il bel vermiglio' *The Prima Donna's Album*	RS	n. d.	'August 1955'
La cerentola: melodrama giocoso in due atti		n.d.	
La cenerentola – 'Nacqui all'affanno, al pianto' *The Contralto Album*	DB/ NN	n. d.	
Duetto buffo di due gati: Two High Voices and Piano	PP	1970	

La donna del lago – 'Elena! Oh tu ch'io chiam *The Contralto Album*	DB/ NN	n.d.	
La donna del lago – 'Oh mattutini albori!'		n. d.	
La donna del lago – 'Oh mattutini albori!' *The Prima Donna's Album*	JC	n. d.	'To dear Joan kindest wishes always/ Bole/ August 30/ 42.'
La donna del lago – 'Oh mattutini albori!' *The Prima Donna's Album*	RS	n.d.	'August 1955'
Duetto per violoncello e contrabasso		1969	
La gazza ladra – 'Di piacer mi blaza il cor' *The Prima Donna's Album*	JC	n. d.	'To dear Joan kindest wishes always/ Bole/ August 30/ 42.'
La gazza ladra – 'Di piacer mi blaza il cor' *The Prima Donna's Album*	RS	n. d.	'August 1955'
La gazza ladra: Ouverture		n. d.	
Guglielmo Tell – Romanza 'Selva opaca'		n. d.	
L'Italiana in Algieri: Drama Giocoso in 2 Atti		1953	

L'Italiana in Algieri – 'Cimentando i venti e l'onde' *The Contralto Album*	DB/ NN	n. d.		
Messe Solennelle: For Four Solo Voices and Chorus (v. s.)		1968		
Messa solenne (v. s.)		1954		
Messe solennelle	PP			BB & PP
Moses in Egypt: An Oratorio	BB	n. d.	[list of characters in BB's hand on contents page]	BB
Otello – 'Assisa a piè d'un salice' *The Prima Donna's Album*	JC	n. d.	'To dear Joan kindest wishes always/ Bole/ August 30/ 42.'	
Otello – 'Assisa a piè d'un salice' *The Prima Donna's Album*	RS	n. d.	'August 1955'	
Otello – 'Che dissi?' *The Prima Donna's Album*	JC	n. d.	'To dear Joan kindest wishes always/ Bole/ August 30/ 42.'	
Otello – 'Che dissi?' *The Prima Donna's Album*	RS	n. d.	'August 1955'	
Otello – 'Deh calma, o ciel' *The Prima Donna's Album*	JC	n. d.	'To dear Joan kindest wishes always/ Bole/ August 30/ 42.'	

Otello – 'Deh calma, o ciel' *The Prima Donna's Album*	RS	n. d.	'August 1955'	
La regatta Veneziana: tre canzonette in dialetto Veneziano	BB	n. d.		BB & PP
Semiramide – 'Eccomi alfine', 'Ah! Quell giorno', 'Oh! Come da quel dì' *The Contralto Album*	DB/ NN	n. d.		
Semiramide – Serena i vaghi rai', 'Bel raggio lusinghier' *The Prima Donna's Album*	JC	n. d.	'To dear Joan kindest wishes always/ Bole/ August 30/ 42.'	
Semiramide – Serena i vaghi rai', 'Bel raggio lusinghier' *The Prima Donna's Album*	RS	n. d.	'August 1955'	
Semiramide – 'In sì Barbara sciagura' *The Contralto Album*	DB/ NN	n. d.		
Serate musicale: per canto e pianoforte	PP	1952		PP
Serate musicale: per canto e pianoforte	PP	1947		
Soirée musicale: otto ariette e quattro duetti per lo studio del canto Italiano	PP	n. d.		PP

Soirée musicale: otto ariette e quattro duetti per lo studio del canto Italiano	BB	n. d.	PP
Serate musicale: per canto e pianoforte	PP	1969	
Stabat Mater: per due soprano, tenore, basso, coro ed orchestra		n. d.	
Tancredi – 'Di tanti palpiti', 'Oh patria', 'Tu che accendi questo core' *The Contralto Album*	DB/ NN	n. d.	
Trois choeurs religieux: la foi, l'espérance, la charité	PP	n.d.	
Zelmira – 'Eccolo, a voi l'affido', 'Ciel pietoso, ciel clemente' *The Prima Donna's Album*	JC	n. d.	'To dear Joan kindest wishes always/ Bole/ August 30/ 42.'
Zelmira – 'Eccolo, a voi l'affido', 'Ciel pietoso, ciel clemente' *The Prima Donna's Album*	RS	n. d.	'August 1955'

Appendix IV

Britten's and Pears's Verdi Recordings

Aïda – Act I 'Ritorna vincitor!'	1947	Ljuba Welitsch (sop.) Josef Krips (cond.)
Luisa Miller – Act III 'Quando le sere al placido' *L'age d'or.*	1928	Tito Schipa (ten.)
Rigoletto – Act II 'Ah cruel fate!' 'Art thou weeping in loneliness?' *Stars of the Old Vic and Sadler's Wells.*	1928	Heddle Nash (Duke)
Le bal masqué – Acte II 'Ma dall'arido stelo divulsa' *L'age d'or.*	1929?	Elizabeth Rothberg (sop.)
Hernani – Acte I 'che mai vegg'io!', 'Infelice! E tuo credevi' *L'age d'or.*	1929?	Ezi Pinza (bass)
Il trovatore – 'Quel son, quelle preci' *Stars of English opera.*	1938	Joan Cross (sop.) Webster Booth (ten.) Sadler's Wells Orch. Lawrence Collingwood (cond.)
Otello – Acte III 'Dio! mi potevi scagliar' (Monologue d'Othello) *L'age d'or.*	1939	Giovanni Martirelli (ten.) Metropolitan Orch. Wilfred Pelletier (cond.)

Rigoletto – 'Bella figlia dell'amore' *Stars of English Opera.*	1939	Noel Eadie Edith Coates (sop.) Webster Booth (ten.) LPO Warwick Braithwaite (cond.)
Simon Boccanegra – Acte I Récit 'Dinne, alcun là non vedesti?' *Rigoletto* – 'Figlia! A tal nome si palpito' *L'age d'or.*	1939?	Rose Bampton (sop.) Lawrence Tibbett (bar.) Wilfred Pelletier (cond.)
Otello – 'Ave Maria'	? (1930s)	Joan Cross (sop.) Lawrence Collingwood (cond.)
Otello – 'The Willow Song'	? (1930s)	Joan Cross (sop.) Lawrence Collingwood (cond.)
Rigoletto – 'Dearest name' *Stars of English Opera.*	1943	Gwen Gatley (sop.) Hallé Orch. Warwick Braithwaite (cond.)
Requiem *Stars of English Oratorio.*	1947	John McHugh ROH orch. Lawrence Collingwood (cond.)
Rigoletto – 'We are equals' *Stars of English Opera.*	1945?	John Hargreaves (bass) LSO Clarence Raybould (cond.)

Rigoletto – 'Cortigiani, vil razza' *Stars of English Opera*	1945?	John Hargreaves (bass) LSO Clarence Raybould (cond.)
Falstaff – Act II Ford's monologue 'Am I dreaming?' *Stars of the Old Vic and Sadler's Wells.*	1948	Redvers Llewellyn (Ford) ROH Orch. Covent Garden Warwick Braithwaite (cond.)
Scenes from Simone Boccanegra *Stars of the Old Vic and Sadler's Wells.*	1948	Howell Glynne Arnold Matters Joyce Gartside (Amelia) Frederick Sharp (Paolo) James Johnston Sadler's Wells Chorus & Orch. ROH Orch. Covent Garden Michael Mudie (cond.)
Falstaff – 'Am I dreaming?' *Stars of English Opera.*	1949	Redvers Llewellyn (bass) ROH Covent Garden Orch. Warwick Braithwaite (cond.)
Otello – 'Ave Maria'	? (late 1940s)	G. Gatti (sop.) LSO Vicenzo Bellezza (cond.)
Otello – 'Willow Song'	? (late 1940s)	Nancy Evans (sop.) LSO Vincenzo Bellezza (cond.)
Un ballo in maschera – 'Re dell'abisso'	1950	Jean Watson

Stars of English Opera.		Philharmonia Orchestra James Robertson (cond.)
La traviata – 'Sempre libera' *Heather Harper: A Musical Portrait.*	1955?	[Unpublished broadcast] Heather Harper (Violetta) Thomas Round (Alfredo) LPO Edward Benton (cond.)
La traviata – 'Addio del passato' *Heather Harper: A Musical Portrait.*	? (1950s)	[Unpublished broadcast] Heather Harper (sop.) LPO Edward bento (cond.)
Rigoletto – 'La donna è mobile' *A Centenary Souvenir.*	1960?	Fernando de Luca (ten.)
Rigoletto – 'E il sol dell'anima' *A Centenary Souvenir.*	1960?	Josephina Huguet (sop.) Fernando de Lucia (ten.)
Rigoletto – Act II 'Vile race of courtiers' *Stars of the Old Vic and Sadler's Wells.*	1962?	Peter Glossop (Rigoletto) Sadler's Wells Orch. James Lockhart (cond.)
Aïda – 'Triumphal march'	1963?	Orch. of Vienna State Opera Armando Aliberti (cond.)
Quatro Pezzi Sacri – 'Laudi alla vergine Maria'	1966	[private recording] Columbus Boys Choir Donald Bryant (dir.)
Falstaff – 'Ehi! Taveniere!' *Royal Opera House Covent Garden.*	1968	Geraint Evans (Falstaff) Covent Garden Orch.

		Edward Downes (cond.)
Otello – 'Fuoco di gioia'	1968	Tito Gobbi (Iago)
Royal Opera House Covent Garden.		John Lenigan (Cassio)
		John Dobson (Rodrigo)
		The Covent Garden Chorus
		Covent Garden Orch.
		Georg Solti (cond.)
La traviata – Preludio dell'atto III	1968	Berlin PO
		Herbert von Karajan (cond.)
Requiem Mass	? (1960s)	Maria Caniglia (sop.)
		Ebe Stignani (mez.)
		Beniamino Gigli (ten.)
		Ezio Pinza (bass)
		ROH Rome Chorus & Orch.
		Tullio Serafini (cond.)
Requiem – 'Confutatis Maledictus'	1971	Roger Stalman (bass)
		Valerie Dickson (pf.)
25 Jahre Komische Oper Berlin DDR:	1972?	Margarita Libowa
Der Troubadour Duett Azucena-Manrico		Anton de Ridder
(scene 8 duet)		
Un ballo in maschera – 'Alla vita che	1973	Linda Esther Gray (sop.)
t'arride'		David Syrus (pf.)
Song recital: Summer at the Maltings		Mark Lufton (bar.)
		John Fraser (pf.)

Requiem Mass	1974	Hannah Francis (sop.) Nancy Evans (mezzo.) Stuart Kale (ten.) Richard Standen (bass) Choir & Orch. of North East Tech. College W. H. Swinburne (cond.)
La traviata – waltz *19th-Century American ballroom music: waltzes, marches, polkas, & other dances 1840-1860*	1975	Smithsonian Social Orch. and Quadrille band James Weaver (cond.)
Operatic excerpts sung by students at the Britten-Pears School - Selections from *La traviata*	1976	Orch. of Vienna State Opera Armando Aliberti (cond.)

Appendix V

Pears's Opera Performances 1938-1945

30 May – 5 June 1938	Mozart *Figaro, Don Giovanni* Verdi *Macbeth* Donizetti *Don Pasquale* (chorus)	Glyndebourne Opera
6 May 1942	Offenbach *The Tales of Hoffmann* (Hoffmann)	Strand Theatre, Walter Süsskind, Hans F. Redlich
19 January 1943	Mozart *Die Zauberflöte* (Tamino)	Sadler's Wells Opera Company, Norman Feasey
3 April 1943	Verdi *Rigoletto* (Duke)	Sadler's Wells Opera Company, Norman Feasey
29 April 1943	Verdi *La traviata* (Alfredo)	Sadler's Wells Opera Company, Herbert Menges
21 July 1943	Rossini *The Barber of Seville* (Almaviva)	Sadler's Wells Opera Company, Norman Feasey
10 November 1943	Smetana *The Bartered Bride* (Vašek)	Sadler's Wells Opera Company, dir. Eric Crozier, cond. Lawrence Collingwood

29 Aug. 1944	Mozart *Così fan tutte* (Ferrando)	Sadler's Wells Opera Company, prod. Sasha Machov, Cond. Lawrence Collingham
21 April/2 May 1944	Verdi *Rigoletto* (Duke)	SWOC, Herbert Menges
27/28 April 1944	Puccini *La bohème* (Rodolfo)	SWOC, prod. Tyrone Guthrie, cond. Lawrence Collingwood
25/29 April/3 May 1944	Smetana *The Bartered Bride* (Jeník)	
12 July 1944	Rossini *The Barber of Seville* (Almaviva)	SWOC, Sunderland
18 July 1944	Verdi *Rigoletto* (Duke)	SWOC, Sunderland
22 July 1944	Puccini *La bohème* (Rodolfo)	SWOC, Sunderland
12/16/24 February 1945	Mozart *Così fan tutte* (Ferrando)	SWOC, Manchester Opera House
23 February 1945	Rossini *The Barber of Seville* (Almaviva)	SWOC, Manchester Opera House

26 February 1945	Verdi *Rigoletto* (Duke)	SWOC, Manchester Opera House
27 February/1 March 1945	Smetana *The Bartered Bride* (Jeník)	SWOC, Manchester Opera House
8/12 May 1945	Verdi *Rigoletto* (Duke)	SWOC, Grand Theatre Wolverhampton
14/18 May 1945	Mozart *Così fan tutte* (Ferrando)	SWOC, Grand Theatre Wolverhampton
15 May 1945	Smetana *The Bartered Bride* (Jeník)	SWOC, Grand Theatre Wolverhampton
24/28/30 July 1945	Smetana *The Bartered Bride* (Jeník)	SWOC, Belfast
27 July 1945	Puccini *La bohème* (Rodolfo)	SWOC, Belfast
2/3/7/9 August 1945	Mozart *Così fan tutte* (Ferrando)	SWOC, Belfast

Appendix VI *Peter Grimes*: Scheme of Acts and Numbers

Act I *Prologo*			***Prologo***	*Moderato ma energico*	
No. 1			**Hobson, Swallow, Peter, Mrs. Sedley, Chorus**		
		1	*Scena con coro* 'Peter Grimes!' (All)		**Trial**; the oath and the accusation
		16	*Arioso con coro* 'Peter Grimes, I here advise you' (Swallow)		The verdict
		17	*Scena con coro* 'Your honour!' (Peter, Hobson, Swallow, Chorus)		Peter's protestations
No. 2			***Recitativo*** **Peter, Ellen**		
		24	*Recitativo* 'The truth, the pity and the truth' (Peter, Ellen)	*Molto più lento*	Ellen comforts Peter with her friendship
No. 1	**Interlude I**	*27*	**Interlude I (*Preludio*)**	*Lento e tranquillo*	
	Act I scene I		***Coro***		
	No. 3		**All**		
		30	*Coro* 'O hang at open doors the net, the cork' (All)	*Lento e tranquillo*	Scene setting; **hymn-like** chorus describing the life of the sea-faring community

	No. 4		***Scena con coro (ritornello)*** **Auntie, Boles, Chorus**		
			Scena con coro	*Animato*	**Pub scene**; gossip about Peter
			(1)Auntie 'Come in, gentlemen, come in'		
		33	(2) Chorus 'Dabbling on shore half naked sea-boys crowd'		
		34	(3) Balstrode 'Shoo! Shoo!'	*Tranquillo*	
			(4) Chorus 'And if the Spring tide eats the		
		36	land again'	*Animato*	
		38	(5) Rector 'Good morning!'		
			(6) Chorus 'For us sea-dwellers this sea		
		39	birth can be death'	*Tranquillo*	
		41	(7) Keene 'I'm coming tonight to see your nieces'		
		42			
No. 2	**No. 5**		***Scena*** **Peter, Balstrode, Keene, Auntie, Hobson, Ellen**		
		44	*Scena* 'Hi! Give us a hand!' (Peter)	*Allegro*	Peter's entrance from the sea
	No. 3	*45*	*Scena arioso* 'I'll give a hand' (Balstrode, Keene, Auntie, Boles)	*Andante pesante*	
	No. 4	*49*	*Scena* 'Grimes, you won't need help from now' (Keene, Peter, Hobson)	*Lento come prima*	Hobson offers Peter a new apprentice
		53	*Arioso con coro* 'I have to go from pub to pub' (Hobson, chorus)		
		54	*Scena con coro* 'Carter! I'll mind your passenger' (Ellen, chorus)		Ellen volunteers to collect Peter's new apprentice

		57	*Arioso con coro* 'The carter goes from pub to pub' (Ellen, chorus)		
No. 5	**No. 6**		***Scena ed aria*** **Ellen, Hobson**		
		60	*Aria* 'Let her among you without fault cast the first stone' (Ellen)	*Con moto*	Ellen sings of the her sympathy towards Peter
No. 6		*62*	*Scena* 'Mr Hobson, where's your cart? I'm ready' (Ellen, Hobson)	*Largamente*	Ellen leaves to collect the apprentice
No. 7	**No. 7**		***Scena e concertato*** **All**		
		65	*Scena* 'Look, the storm cone' (Balstrode)	*Allegro molto*	Approach of the **storm**
		66	*Concertato* 'Now the flood-tide and sea horses' (All)		Community solidarity in the face of the elements
No. 8	**No. 8**		***Scena e duetto*** **Balstrode, Peter**		
		87	*Duetto Recitativo* 'And do you prefer the storm to Auntie's parlour and the rum?' (Balstrode, Peter)		Balstrode enquires after Peter
		91	*Scena* 'Then to the crowner sits to hint' (Balstrode)		
	No. 9		***Aria racconto*** **Peter, Balstrode**		
		92	*Cavatina racconto* 'Picture what that day was like, that evil day' (Peter)		Peter's description of the death of the first apprentice
		95	*Scena* 'This storm is useful' (Balstrode)		Balstrode's advice

		95	*Cabaletta* 'They listen to money' (Peter)	*Vivace*	Peter's disavowal of the community
	No. 10		***Duetto*** **Balstrode, Peter**		
		98	*Duetto* 'Man, go and ask her' (Balstrode, Peter)		Balstrode tries to persuade Peter to marry Ellen, but he is unresponsive
	No. 11		***Aria*** **Peter**		
		101	*Aria* 'What harbour shelters peace' (Peter)	*Largamente*	Peter's yearnings for 'home' and peace
	Interlude II	*104*	**Interlude II**		
No. 1	**Act I scene ii**		***Scena e duettino***		
	No. 1		**Auntie, Nieces, Mrs Sedley, Balstrode, Boles**		
		118	*Recitativo* 'Past time to close' (Auntie, Mrs Sedley, Balstrode, Boles)	*Animato*	Pub scene with interjections from the storm outside
		122	*Duettino* Nieces	*Più presto*	
		123	*Recitativo* 'Do you think we should stop our storm for such as you?' (Auntie, Mrs Sedley, Balstrode, Boles)	*Animato*	
No. 2		*124*	*Arioso con pertichini* 'Loud man' (Auntie, Nieces, Mrs. Sedley)	*Moderato e pesante*	
No. 3		*127*	*Recitativo* 'There's been a land-slide up the coast!' (Auntie, Mrs Sedley, Balstrode, Boles, Fishermen)	*Animato* *Allegro molto*	
No. 4/5	**No. 2**		***Arioso e concertato*** **Balstrode, All**		
		129	*Arioso e concertato* 'Pub conversation should depend on this	*Andante tranquillo*	Community solidarity (sinister)

			eternal moral'/ 'we keep our hands to ourselves' (Balstrode, All)		
No. 6	**No. 3**		***Aria*** **Peter**		
		139	*Aria* 'Now the Great Bear and Pleiades' (Peter)	*Adagio*	Peter's visionary observations
No. 7	**No. 4**		***Scena con coro (brindisi)*** **All**		
		142	*Scena con coro* 'He's mad or drunk' (All)	*Allegretto*	Community misunderstands Peter's insights
No. 8		*147*	*Brindisi* 'Old Joe has gone fishing' (All)	*Con slancio!*	**Drinking song**
No. 9		*168*	*Scena* 'The bridge is down' (Ellen, Hobson, Boy, Peter)	*Presto con fuoco*	Ellen presents the apprentice to Peter
	Act II scene i **Interlude III**	*172*	**Interlude III**	*Allegro spiritoso*	
No. 1	**No. 1**		***Arietta*** **Ellen, Boy**		
		177	*Arietta* 'Glitter of waves and glitter of sunlight' (Ellen)		**Church scene** between Ellen and the silent apprentice
No. 2	**No. 2**		***Scena con coro*** **Ellen, Boy, Chorus**		
		183	*Scena con coro* (Ellen, chorus) (1) 'Now that the daylight fills the sky' (2) 'Wherefore' (intonations) (3) 'Gloria' (4) 'I believe in God the father'	*Maestoso* *Andante con moto* *Adagio*	Off-stage church service; Ellen discovers bruises on the apprentice; Peter enters and thrashes out at Ellen in anger

No. 3	**No. 3**		***Terzetto*** **Auntie, Keene, Boles**		
		206	*Terzetto* (Auntie, Keene, Boles) 'Fool! To let it come to this!'	*Allegretto*	Auntie, Keene and Boles, who have been observing the previous scene, condemn Peter's actions
		210	*Scena* Auntie, Keene, Mrs. Sedley 'Leave him out of it!'	*Poco più mosso*	
No. 4			***Recitativo*** **Auntie 'Doctor'**		
No. 5			***Coro*** **Lawyer 'Dullards'**		
No. 6			***Recitativo ed Coro*** **Boles 'People ... No I will speak'**		
	No. 4		***Scena con concertato*** **All**		
		214	*Scena* 'Grimes is at his exercise' (chorus)	*Presto*	Community condemn Peter
No. 7		*228*	*Concertato with stretto* 'We planned that our lives should have a new start' (Ellen, chorus)	*Larghetto* *Allegro molto*	*Concertato* culminating with a **laughing chorus**
No. 8	**No. 5**		***Scena con coro*** **Rector, Swallow, Balstrode, Mrs. Sedley, chorus**		
		243	*Scena* 'Swallow! Shall we go and see Grimes in his hut?' (Rector, Swallow, Balstrode, Mrs. Sedley, chorus)		Plan to visit Peter's hut

No. 9	**No. 6**		***Coro***		
			All		
		247	*Coro* 'Now is gossip put on trial' (All)	*Grave*	The Hunt for Peter; **Military dance of death**
No. 10	**No. 7**		***Quartetto***		
			Auntie, Nieces, Ellen		
		253	*Quartetto* 'From the gutter' (Auntie, Nieces, Ellen)	*Andante tranquillo*	Auntie and her Nieces warn Ellen of the dangers of Peter
	Interlude IV	*259*	**Interlude IV** **Passacaglia**	*Andante moderato*	
No. 1	**Act II scene ii**		***Aria con coro***		
	No. 1		**Peter**		
		269	*Aria* 'Go there!' (Peter)	*Allegro Vivace*	Peter prepares the apprentice for the sea; interjections from the '**hunting**' community (from 278)
				Andante-Lento tranquillo-Adagio-Piu mosso	
		280	*Aria con coro* 'Now! Now!' (Peter, chorus)	*Grave*	Advance of the community; boy slips to his death on the rocks (287)
No. 2	**No. 2**		***Scena ed arioso***		
			Peter, Swallow, Rector		
		287	*Recitativo* 'Peter Grimes! Peter Grimes!' (Peter, Swallow, Rector)		
		289	*Arioso* 'The whole affair gives Boro' talk its shall I say quietus' (Swallow, Rector)	*Andante moderato*	[BB] 'Swallow draws the moral'
		290	*Intermezzo*	*Grave*	Orchestral description of Balstrode's investigations of the scene

	Act III **Interlude V**	*293*	**Interlude V**	*Andante comodo e rubato*	
No. 1	**Act III scene i** **No. 1**		***Scena e terzetto*** **Swallow, Nieces**		
		299	*Scena e terzetto* 'Assign your prettiness to me' (Swallow, Nieces)	*Vivace alla Barn Dance*	Men move between the Moot Hall and the 'Boar'; **off-stage band**
No. 2			***Recitativo*** **Niece 2 'Ned Keene is chasing me'**		
	No. 2		***Scena con coro*** **Keene, Mrs. Sedley, Burgesses, Rector, Chorus**		
		308	*Scena* 'Ahoy!' (Keene, Mrs. Sedley)	*Lento*	Dance band and pub gossip
		313	*Scena con coro* 'Come along, doctor! We're not wanted here, we oldsters!' (Burgesses, Rector)	*Allegro molto alla Hornpipe*	
No. 3		*319*	*Scena* 'Crime which my hobby is sweetens my thinking' (Mrs. Sedley)	*Lento*	
No. 4			***Recitativo*** **Keene 'Are you mad, old woman'**		
No. 5			***Song*** **Rector 'I looked in a moment'**		
No. 6			***Recitativo*** **Chorus 'Good night'**		
No. 7	**No. 3**		***Scena ed aria*** **Ellen, Balstrode**		
		320	*Scena* 'Is the boat in?' (Ellen, Balstrode)	*Lento*	Ellen and Balstrode sympathetically discuss Peter's plight

		321	*Aria* 'Embroidery in childhood was a luxury of idleness' (Ellen)	*Andante con moto tranquillo*	Ellen realises the boy's death
No. 8		*324*	*Scena* 'We'll find him' (Ellen, Balstrode)	*Come sopra* *Poco animando* *Adagio*	
	No. 4		***Scena e concertato*** **Mrs. Sedley, Swallow, Auntie, Chorus**		
		326	*Scena* Mrs. Sedley, Swallow, Auntie, Hobson 'Mister Swallow'	*Allegro molto alla Galop* *Andante*	Return to the dance in Moot Hall; the community plan to track Peter down
		334	*Coro* All 'Who holds himself apart'		Dance fades out; community congregate to trace Peter
		340	*Concertato* Nieces, Mrs. Sedley, Boles, Keene, Swallow 'Our curse shall fall on this evil day'	*Andante – Molto largamente – Presto*	Community anger; **curse scene**; ending with **laughing chorus**
	Interlude VI	*360*	**Interlude VI**	*Lento*	
No. 1	**Act III scene ii** **No. 1**		***Aria con coro*** **Peter**		
		363	*Aria con coro* 'Steady! There you are!' (Peter)	*Lento – Andante comodo e molto*	Peter's **mad scene**. He sails out to sea to sink the boat and drown himself
No. 2	**No. 2**		***Scena*** Balstrode 'I'll help you with the boat now'		Balstrode and Ellen advise Peter that he should commit suicide; he sails out to sea to sink the boat
No. 3	**No. 3**		***Epilogo*: *Scena con coro e concertato*** **All**		
		372	*Intermezzo*	*Lento e tranquillo*	Dawn on the sea-shore
		373	*Scena con coro* 'To those who pass, the Borough sounds betray' (chorus); 'There's a boat sinking out at sea' (Swallow, Auntie)		**Hymn-like** chorus; Peter's boat is sighted sinking

376	*Concertato* 'In ceaseless motion comes and goes the tide' (All)	Work continues

Page numbering as found in the original thesis

Appendix VII *Billy Budd*: Scheme of Acts and Numbers

[33.26]	**Act I *Prologo***		***Preludio e Scena (senza Romanza)***		
	No. 0i		**Vere**		
4.34		(1)	**Orchestral *Preludio***	***[Parable beginning]***	
		*(1)**		***[Introduction]***	
				Andante	
		(1-6)		*Animato/*	Vere's reminiscence;
		(1-6)	***Scena* 'I am an old man who has experienced much'**	*Largamente*	Billy's stammer
			(Vere)	*Andante*	
7.12	**Scene i**		***Scena con Coro (Ritornello)***		
	No. 1		**Ship's crew**		
		(6-17)	*Scena con Coro* 'Pull, my bantums!'	***[I. First***	Life on a Man O'War
		(6-17)	(Ship's crew)	***Movement]***	
			Ritornelli 'O heave'	*Allegro*	
			(1) Octaves (on F#) – A'	*energico*	
			(2) In thirds (on A#/F#) and in canon – A"		
			(3) Reduced version (on F#) – A"'		
			(4) Reduced version (on A#) – A"'		
			(5) Reduced version (on F#/A#) – A""		
		(17-24)	*Scena*		Work on deck; The Bosun condemns the Novice to a flogging
		(17-24)	(Ship's crew, Novice, Bosun, Maintop)		
			(a) Maintop 'All manned above'		
			(b) Bosun 'Who did that?'		
			(c) Chorus 'Sway'		
			(d) Bosun 'You again! You Novice'		
		(24-25)	*Scena con Coro*		The crew's work song; celebration of the ship's community
		(24-25)	(Ship's crew)		
			Ritornello 'O heave'		
			(6) Full version (on F# /A#) – A		

	No. 2		***Scena ed Arietta***		
			Sailing Master		
		(26-29)	*Scena*		The boarding party
		(26-29)	(Midshipmen, Redburn, First Lieutenant, Sailing Master)		
			(1) *Scena* (with residues of *Ritornello*) 'Boat ahoy!'		
			(2) *Recitativo* 'Sir! Boarding party to larboard'		
		(29)	*Arietta* 'We seem to have the devil's own luck'	*Più pesante*	Sailing Master's lament
		(29)	(Sailing Master)		
6.15	**No. 3**		***Arrivo e Rapporto***		
			Ratcliffe, First Lieutenant		
		(30-31)	*Arrivo e Rapporto* 'Three men impressed. No resistance'		The new recruits are announced
		(30-31)	(Ratcliffe, First Lieutenant)		
	No. 4		***Intervesto, Arioso e Scena***		
			Claggart, Sailing Master, Red Whiskers, Arthur Jones, Budd		
		(31-43)	*Intervesto* 'First man forward!'	*Lento feroce/ Poco più mosso/ Stringendo*	The interview; the three sailors; Billy's stammer
		(31-43)	(Claggart, Sailing Master, Red Whiskers, Arthur Jones, Budd)		
			(1) Red Whiskers 'I object'		
			(2) Arthur Jones 'Arthur Jones'		
			(3) Budd 'Billy Budd, Sir!'; 'I was … a …'		
2.16		(43-45)	*Arioso* 'Billy Budd, king of the birds!'	*Vivace*	Billy celebrates his life at sea
		(43-45)	(Budd)		
		(46-49)	*Scena e Coro* 'Farewell old Rights o' Man'	*Largamente*	Billy bids farewell to his old life, but raises anxieties among the officers
		(46-49)	(Budd, Sailing Master, Ratcliffe, First Lieutenant)		
3.22	**No. 5**		***Arioso con Scena***		
			Claggart		
		(49-51)	*Arioso* 'I heard your honour'	*Con forza/ Presto*	Claggart pledges to watch Billy
		(49-51)	(Claggart)		

		(51-55) *(51-55)*	*Scena* 'Keep an eye on that man' (Claggart, Squeak)	*Presto*	Claggart enlists the help of Squeak
	No. 6		***Scena e Quartetto*** **Novice, Novice's friend, Budd, Dansker, Red Whiskers, Donald**		
		(55-56) *(55-56)*	*Scena (Tempo d'attacca)* 'The flogging, Sir. All duly over' (Novice's friend, Claggart)	***[II. Slow Movement: 'The Passion']*** *Lento*	After the Novice's flogging **[Stages of the cross]**
3.18		(56-61) *(56-61)*	*Duetto con Coro* 'Come along kid' (Novice, Novice's Friend, Chorus)	*L'istesso tempo*	
3.15	**No. 7**		***Scena e Concertato*** **Budd, Dansker, Donald, Red Whiskers**		
		(61-68) *(61-68)*	*Scena e Concertato* (Budd, Dansker, Donald, Red Whiskers) (1) Budd – Dansker – Budd 'Christ the poor chap' (2) Red Whiskers – Dansker – Dansker/Donald 'I protest' (3) *Quartetto con concertato, quasi recitativo* (i) 'I'll give no offence' (ii) 'I'll give no offence' (iii.a) 'No, I won't' (iii.b) *Concertato* close	***[III. Scherzo]*** *Prestissimo leggiero*	Reaction to the flogging
	No. 8		***Scena ed Entrada*** **Budd, Claggart, Donald, Dansker, Red Whiskers**		
		(68-72)	*Scena* (Claggart, Donald, Dansker, Red Whiskers) (1) Donald 'That's the one to study if you want to dodge punishment' (2) Dansker 'Billy, be warned' (3) Donald, Dansker 'Starry Vere' (4) Claggart 'fall in'	***[IV. Finale]*** *Lento*	Billy is warned against Claggart; preparation for the Captain's Muster; Claggart reacts to Billy's 'beauty'

			(5) Claggart, Billy 'fancy neckerchief'		
		(72-77)	*Entrada* (*quasi tempo d'attacca*) (Chorus) (1) 'Captain's muster' (2) 'Orders, orders' (3) 'Starry Vere'	*Allegro*	Captain's Muster
3.54	**No. 9**		***Finale I: Aria e Concertato*** **Vere, Chorus**		
		(77-85)	*Aria (Discorso Eroico, Richiamo e Risposta)* (Vere, Chorus) (1) 'Greetings' (call-response; Vere-chorus) (2a) 'The danger' (call-resp.) (2b) 'Meet 'em like the British' (call-resp.) (2c) 'The French are bold' (call-resp.) (2d) 'Expect action' (call-resp.)	*Più lento e maestoso*	Starry Vere; Vere's 'deification'
		(85-92)	*Seguita dell' Aria, quasi Stretta* (Vere, Budd, Chorus) (3a) Budd 'I'll follow you' (3b) Ship's crew 'Long live Captain Vere' (3c) Budd 'I'll follow you' (3d) Ship's crew 'We're proud to serve you'		Billy pledges his life to Vere

* Numbers in italics refer to page numbers as they appear in the most readily available score (Boosey & Hawkes, two-act version, 1961).

[27.05]	**Act II Scene i**		***Scena, Arioso, Duettino e Coro*** **Vere, First Lieutenant, Sailing Master, Chorus**		
4.46	**No. 1°**	(93-94) *(81-82)*	**Orchestral *Prelude***	*Andante tranquillo*	Evening
	No. 1b		***Scena ed Arioso*** **Vere, Boy**		
		(94) *(82)*	*Scena* 'Boy' 'My compliments to Mr. Redburn and Mr. Flint' (Vere, Boy)		Vere calls the ship's officers to his cabin
		(94-95) *(82-83)*	*Arioso quasi Preghiera* 'Plutarch, the Greeks and the Romans' (Vere)	*Più andante*	Vere reads Plutarch
	No. 1c		***Scena e Duettino*** **Vere, Boy, Sailing Master, First Lieutenant**		
		(95-98) *(83-86)*	*Scena (con primo brindisi)* 'Mr. Redburn and Mr. Flint, sir.' (Vere, Boy, Sailing Master, First Lieutenant)	*Animato*	The officers dine with Vere and toast the King
5.16		(98-100) *(86-88)*	*Duettino* 'Don't like the French' (Sailing Master, First Lieutenant)	*Moderato*	The French
		(100-102) *(88-90)*	*Scena (con secondo brindisi)* 'Beg pardon, sir'; 'the French! Down with them' (Vere, Sailing Master, First Lieutenant)	*Moderato/ Come sopra*	A toast to victory over the French
	No. 1d		***Scena ed Aria (con Coro)*** **Vere, Sailing Master, First Lieutenant**		
		(102) *(90)*	*Scena* 'Any danger of French notions spreading this side, sir?' (Vere, Sailing Master, First Lieutenant)		Threat of mutiny
		(103-104) *(91-92)*	*Cavatina/Arioso quasi preghiera* 'Oh, the Nore' (First Lieutenant)	*Lento Misurato*	Tales of past mutiny
		(104) *(92)*	*Scena* 'Ay, at Spithead' (Vere)		Tales of past mutiny: Spithead

		(104-106) *(93-94)*	*Cabaletta/Arioso* 'But at the Nore' (Vere)	*Allegro Agitato*	Tales of past mutiny: The Nore
4.25		(106-109) *(94-97)*	*Scena* 'We must be on our guard' (Vere, Sailing Master, First Lieutenant)	*Stringendo*	Officers recall Billy and the 'Rights o' Man'
		(109-111) *(97-99)*	*Coro* (*ninna-nanna*) 'Blow her away'; 'And listen to them singing' (*pertichini*) (Vere, Sailing Master, First Lieutenant, Chorus)	*Lento come sopra*	The lullaby of the crew and the anxiety of the officers
	No. 1e (1bii)		***Scena e Coro*** **Vere**		
		(112-113) *(99-101)*	*Scena* 'Land on the port bow, sir' (Vere, Sailing Master, First Lieutenant)	*Allegro*	The officers leave
		(113-115) *(101-103)*	*Scena e Coro* 'At the battle of Salamis the Athenians' (Vere, chorus)	*Tempo I (Slow as before)*	Vere recalls Plutarchian battles
3.09	**No. 2**	(115-117) *(103-106)*	**Orchestral *Intermezzo*** 'Blow her away' 'Over the water'	*Tranquillo, ma un poco più andante/ Animato*	Sea shanties
	Scene ii No. 3		***Coro e Canzone di Mare (Sea Shanty)*** **Chorus**		
		(118-121) *(106-109)*	*Coro* 'Blow her away' (Chorus and semi-chorus)	*Largamente*	The crew's nostalgia
3.54		(121-130) *(109-118)*	*Canzone di Mare* (Donald, Red Whiskers, Budd, Dansker, Chorus) (1) Donald 'We're off to Samoa' (2) Red Whiskers 'We're towing to Malta' (3) Budd 'We're off to Savannah' (4) Donald 'We're off to Nantucket' (5) Red Whiskers 'We're riding the ocean' (6) Budd 'We're off to Bermuda' (7) Donald 'We're anchored off Scilly' (8) *Stretta di Canzone*: 'She'll eat up her Billy for pie'	*Allegro ritmico* *lento e liberamente/ animando*	Sea shanties

			Scena		
3.59		(130-139)	**(Dansker, Red Whiskers, Budd, Squeak, Claggart)**		
		(118-127)	(1) Budd 'Come along, Dansker, join in the fun!' (overlapping end of *Stretta*)	*Animato*	Billy stammers; Billy discovers Squeak and fights
			(2) Budd, Chorus 'Hi! ... You … a … a …'		
			(3) Budd 'Come out of that'		
			(4) *Combattimento*: Budd, Squeak, Chorus 'So that's it'	*Slow (as before)/ Presto*	
			Scena ed Aria		
	No. 4		**Claggart**		
		(139-144)	**Scena**	*Presto*	Claggart quells the unrest
		(127-132)	(Claggart, Budd, Squeak, Chorus)		
			(1) Claggart 'Avast there', Chorus 'Look out!'		
			(2) Dansker (*racconto*) 'Billy went to his bag'		
			(3) Claggart, Squeak 'Seize him'		Claggart strikes boy and muses on Billy's beauty;
			(4) Claggart, Boy 'Look where you go'		
			(5) *tempo d'attacca*: Chorus 'Over the water'; Claggart (*pertichini*) 'Handsomely done'	*Slower, as at [76]*	The crew sing of home
4.45		(144-155)	*Cavatina – Catena* 'O beauty, o handsomeness, goodness'	*Più mosso ed agitato Allegro con brio/ Animato/ Tempo Primo/Adagio*	Claggart's 'Credo';
		(133-143)	(Claggart)		intent to destroy Billy; Dance of death ('dies irae')
4.33	**No. 5**		***Scena***		
			Claggart, Novice		
		(155-163)	*Scena* 'Come here. Remember your promise'	*Adagio/ Con moto/ Adagio*	Claggart coerces Novice; Fate
		(143-150)	(Claggart, Novice)		
3.46	**No. 6**		***Finale II: Scena e Duetto***		
			Budd, Novice		
		(163)	*Scena/tempo d'attacco* 'Billy! Hist, Billy Budd'	*Lento*	Dream scene; Death prophecy
		(151)	(Budd, Novice)		

		(164-168) *(152-156)*	*Cavatina* 'It's unjust, it's unfair!' (Novice)	*Allegro molto*	The cruelty of being press-ganged
		(168-170) *(156-158)*	*Duettino* 'Guineas. Look at them.' (Budd, Novice)		The Novice offers Billy guineas **[The temptation]**
		(170) *(158)*	*Tempo di mezzo* 'Ah ... a ...'; 'Billy! Billy!' (Budd, Novice)	*Lento, come sopra*	Billy stammers, enraged
4.19		(171-173) *(159-162)*	*Scena e racconto* 'Dansker, old friend' (Budd, Dansker)	*Molto animato/ Poco Stringendo*	Dansker comforts Billy
		(173-181) *(162-169)*	*Cabaletta* 'I want nothing o' yours, baby. Jemmy Legs is down on you'; 'But Jemmy Legs likes me' (Budd, Dansker)	*Deciso/ Lively*	Dansker warns Billy of the dangers of Claggart
[44.48]	**Act III** **Scene i**		***Scena e Concertato*** **Vere, Claggart, All Voices (*tutti*)**		
3.14	**No. 1°**	(182-183) *(170-171)*	**Orchestral *Preludio (i)***	***Vivace***	Anticipation ('this is our moment') and frustration
	No. 1b		***Scena e Arioso*** **Vere, First Lieutenant, Claggart**		
		(183-184) *(171-172)*	*Scena* 'I don't like the look of the mist' (Vere, First Lieutenant)		The mist descends
		(184-185) *(172-173)*	*Scena* 'The Master-at-Arms is here to see you, sir' (Vere, First Lieutenant)		Claggart arrives to speak to Vere
		(185-187) *(173-175)*	*Arioso (quasi scena) interrotto* (overlap with previous *scena*) 'With great regret' (Claggart, Vere)	***Lento***	Claggart begins to accuse Billy of mutiny
4.57	**No. 1c**		***Scena, Coro e Concertato (con Ritornello)*** **(Vere, All Voices)**		
		(187-197)	*Scena e Coro (divisi à tre: Quarter Deck – QD; Main*	***[Intensification]***	The mist lifts; the

	(175-184)	*Deck – MD; Hauling Party – HP)* (Vere, All Voices) (1) Maintop 'Deck ahoy!' (2) First Lieutenant, Sailing Master, Lieutenant Ratcliffe, QD 'Enemy sail' (3) MD 'The French at last' (4) Vere 'A Frenchman' (5) Bosun, HP 'Come on you lubbers and sway'; MD (*ritornello*) 'This is our moment'(i) (6) Vere – QD 'Make sail' (7) Vere 'Action Mister Redburn'	*Vivace (come sopra)/ Molto animato*	French are sighted; officers assemble
	(197-209) *(185-197)*	***Concertato preparazióne per azione*** (Vere, All Voices) (1) QD, MD 'This is our moment' (ii) (1) Gunners 'Come on, boys'; MD 'This is our moment' (iii) (2) Seamen 'Quick, lads, there's a battle in the wind!'; MD 'This is our moment' (iv) (3) After-guardsmen 'Tubs ahoy!' (4) Powder monkeys 'Look out!' (5) Marines 'Left right, left right'; MD 'This is our moment' (v)	*Sempre molto vivace*	Preparation for battle; members of the ship's crew gather to take their places
	(209-216) *(197-203)*	(7) Vere 'Volunteers'; Donald 'Take me, sir'; Red Whiskers 'Very well, I'll go too'; Dansker 'Take an old salt'; Budd 'Here's another' (*arioso con Coro* 'he's the one') (8) First Lieutenant 'Fall in there'; MD 'This is our moment' (vi); Budd, Red Whiskers, Dansker, Donald (*Quartettino con Coro*) 'Now we'll see action';		Volunteers (Donald, Red Whiskers, Dansker, Billy) are recruited to board the French ship
	(216-219) *(204-206)*	(9) All Voices 'This is our moment'(vii) (10) QD 'Report guns ready'		Preparation for battle
4.56	(219-236) *(206-224)*	(11) MD, All Voices *(coro con preghiera (i))* 'Wind, wind fill our sails' (12) Vere 'Mister Redburn, sight the long eighteens' (*concertato*)		The shot; the cannon falls short

			(13) MD, All Voices 'This is our moment'(viii)	*[Highpoint (a)]*	
			(14) Maintop 'Short, deck! Short by half a mile'; MD, All Voices 'Back to our waiting'		
			(15) MD *(coro con preghiera (ii))* 'Wind, wind, fill our sails'		
			(16) Officers, All Voices 'The mist'; Vere (*arioso*) 'Ay, the mist is back to foil us'; Vere (*scena*) 'Give orders to dismiss'		
			(17) MD 'Gone is our moment' (*coro con pertichini*)	***[Highpoint (b)]***	Negative epiphany; the mist descends
			(18) Sailing master 'It's bad for the men'; QD 'They're taking it badly'		
			(19) ***Orchestral Preludio (ii)***	***[Dissolution]***	
3.23	**No. 1d**		***Scena e Duetto*** **Vere, Claggart, Boy**		
		(236-238) *(224-226)*	*Scena* 'There you are again, Master-at-Arms'; 'Now be brief, man, for God's sake!' (Vere, Claggart)	*Lento come sopra*	
		(238-246) *(226-233)*	**Duetto (Vere, Claggart)**		Claggart accuses Billy of mutiny
			(1) Claggart (*aria con pertichini*) 'There's a man on board who's dangerous'	*Con moto/ Tranquillo, ma con più moto/ Più mosso, ma pesante*	
			(2) Claggart (*racconto*) 'Perhaps you would inspect these guineas?'		
3.04			(3) Vere 'Nay, you're mistaken'; Claggart 'Pleasant looks' (*duetto*)		Vere opposes Claggart
		(246-249) *(233-236)*	**Scena *(Vere, Claggart, Boy)***	*A tempo/ Poco meno mosso*	Vere instructs the Boy to call Billy for interview; Claggart leaves
			(1) Claggart 'Sir! Sir!'		
			(2) Vere 'Boy!'		
			(3) Orchestral Conclusion (*Claggart sta in partenza*)		
	No. 2		**Scena e Quartetto** **Vere, Sailing Master, First Lieutenant, Lieutenant Ratcliffe**		

		(249-252)	Quartetto *'O this cursed mist'*	*Più lento*	Mist and confusion
		(236-239)	(Vere, Sailing Master, First Lieutenant, Lieutenant Ratcliffe)		
		(252)	*Arioso* 'O for the light, the light of clear heaven'		Vere yearns for moral guidance
		(239)	(Vere)		
		(252-255)	Orchestral *Intermezzo*	*Lento ma insensibilmente accelerando sin al* [57]	'O for the light'; Vere's prayer for resolution
		(239-242)			
4.06	**Scene ii**		**Aria/Duetto e Scena**		
	No. 3		**Vere, Budd**		
		(256-258)	*Aria (cavatina strophe 1) (i)* 'Claggart, John Claggart	*Vivace*	Vere's determination to
		(243-245)	beware'		oppose Claggart
			(Vere)		
5.24		(258-260)	*Tempo di mezzo (scena quasi arioso conversazionale)*	*Giocoso*	Billy hopes to become
		(245-247)	*(ii)* 'You wanted to see me'		Captain of the Mizzen
			(Vere, Budd)		top
		(260-264)	*Duetto (cavatina strophe 2) (iii=i+ii)* Vere 'And this is		Vere is persuaded of
		(247-251)	the man I'm told is dangerous'; Budd 'I'd die for you'		Billy's goodness
			(Vere, Budd)		
		(264-265)	*Scena* 'You must forget all that for the present'		Vere calls for a meeting
		(251-252)	(Vere, Budd)		with Claggart and Billy
	No. 4		***Scena ed Aria***		
			Vere, Claggart, Budd		
		(265-266)	***Orchestral Introduzione***	*Allegro/ Lento*	Claggart and Billy enter
		(252-253)			Vere's cabin
		(266-267)	*Scena* (*recitativo*)	*Allegro/ Lento/*	Vere asks Claggart to
		(253-254)	'Master-at-Arms and Foretopman, I speak to you both'	*Allegro*	repeat his accusation
			(Vere)		
		(267-269)	*Cavatina* (*accusa*)	*Lento*	Confrontation between
		(254-256)	'William Budd, I accuse you'		'Good' and 'Evil'
			(Claggart)		

3.37		(269-273) *(256-260)*	*Tempo di mezzo* (Vere, Claggart, Budd) (1) Claggart 'William Budd, answer' (2) Budd 'a … a ...' (3) Vere 'God o'mercy' (*Quasi Marcia funebra*) (4) Vere 'The mists have cleared – o terror, what do I see?'	*Allegro* *Più mosso* *Lento*	Billy stammers in frustration and strikes Claggart; Claggart drops dead
		(273-277) *(260-264)*	*Cabaletta* 'Scylla and Charybdis'; 'Beauty, handsomeness, goodness' (Vere)	*Molto agitato*	Vere understands that the trial will be his
	No. 5		***Quartetto e Scena*** **Vere, First Lieutenant, Sailing Master, Lieutenant Ratcliffe**		
		(277-282) *(264-269)*	*Quartetto* (*concertato*) 'Gentlemen, William Budd has killed the Master-at-Arms' (Vere, First Lieutenant, Sailing Master, Lieutenant Ratcliffe)		Vere tells his officers that Billy has killed Claggart
		(282-283) *(269-271)*	Scena *'Justice must be done'* *(Vere)*	*Più mosso*	Vere summons the drumhead court
	No. 6		***Processo, Scena e Trio*** **Vere, Budd, First Lieutenant, Sailing Master, Lieutenant Ratcliffe**		
		(284-285) *(271-272)*	Orchestral *Introduzione (pomposo e quasi Ritornello(i))*	*Grave*	The men solemnly join Claggart and prepare the court
5.36		(285-292) *(272-275)*	Scena (First Lieutenant, Sailing Master, Vere, Budd) (1) First Lieutenant (*accusa*) 'William Budd, you are accused' (2) Vere (*racconto*) 'The Master-at-Arms denounced the prisoner to me' (3) First Lieutenant (*interrogazione*) 'The Captain has spoken, is it as he said?'		Billy's trial; the accusation

			(4) Budd (*arioso risposta*) 'Sir, I am loyal to my country and my king' (Budd)	*Vivace*	Billy's defence
			(5) First Lieutenant (Scena interrogazione) 'Did you bear any malice against the Master-at-Arms?' (First Lieutenant, Budd, Vere)		Assessing the evidence; Billy pleads with Vere to save him
		(292-293) *(279-280)*	Orchestral *Partenza (ritornello ii)*		Billy leaves
3.47		(293-299) *(280-286)*	*Terzetto* 'Poor fellow, who could save him?'; 'We've no choice' (unison refrain) (First Lieutenant, Sailing Master, Lieutenant Ratcliffe)	*Allegretto*	The officers ponder Billy's fate
		(299-302) *(286-289)*	*Scena* (Vere, First Lieutenant, Sailing Master, Lieutenant Ratcliffe)		The officers seek Vere's advice, but he remains silent; the verdict; Billy is condemned to hanging
			(1) Sailing Master 'Sir, before we decide, sir, help us'		
			(2) Vere 'Pronounce your verdict'		
			(3) First Lieutenant, Sailing Master, Lieutenant Ratcliffe (*verdetto*) 'Guilty'		
		(302) *(289)*	Orchestral *Partenza (ritornello iii)*		The officers leave
4.44	**No. 7a**		***Aria ed Intermezzo*** **Vere**		
		(303-307) *(290-294)*	*Cavatina (funebra)* 'I accept their verdict'; 'beauty, handsomeness, goodness' (Vere)	*Misurato*	Vere's tortured reflections
		(307-308) *(294-295)*	*Cabaletta* 'I am the messenger of death' (Vere)	*Allegro*	Vere as Billy's executioner
	No. 7b	(309) *(296)*	Orchestral *Intermezzo (scena invisible with link to Act IV)* (*Tinta* Chords)	*Largo*	Offstage interview between Vere and Billy

[24.18]	**Act IV Scene I, No. 1**		***Aria* (no *Scena*)** **Budd**		
8.51		(310-315) *(297-302)*	*Cavatina* 'Look! Through the port comes the moonshine astray!' (Budd)	*Andante*	Billy in the darbies
		(315-322) *(302-309)*	*Tempo di mezzo* (*Scena e Duetto*) 'Here! Baby!' (Budd, Dansker)	*Poco animando - animando*	Billy and Dansker eat and drink together **[Eucharist]**
4.27		(322-326) *(309-313)*	*Cabaletta* 'And farewell to ye, old Rights o'Man' (Budd)	*Molto animato*	Billy's farewell
		(326) *(313)*	*Largamente* (in place of *Stretta*) and *tinta* chords 'I'm strong' (Budd)	*Largamente*	Billy accepts his fate
	No. 2		***Intermezzo***		
		(327-328) *(314-315)*	Orchestral *Intermezzo*	*Poco Vivace/ Strascinando*	
	Scene ii, No. 3		**Gran Marcia, Scena e Coro**		
		(329-333) *(316-320)*	*Marcia* (Assembly of ship's crew)	*Grave*	Ship's assembly
4.51		(333-335) *(320-322)*	*Melodramma e Scena* 'According to the Articles of Law' (First Lieutenant, Budd, Chorus)	*Più mosso ed accel/molto lento*	The hanging **[Crucifixion]**
2.19		(335-343) *(322-330)*	*Coro con Stretta* 'Ur' (Double Chorus)	*Presto*	Thwarted mutiny
4.30	***Epilogo*, No. 0ii**		***Epilogo* (*Scena e Romanza*)** **Vere**		
		(343-346) *(330-333)*	Scena 'We committed his body to the deep' (Vere)	**[Parable end]** Andante, come prima	Conclusion of Vere's Narrative
		(346-348) *(333-335)*	Romanza and tinta chords 'I was lost on the infinite sea' (Vere)	Molto tranquillo	

Appendix VIII Britten's *War Requiem* and *Verdi's Requiem*: Structural Parallels

Britten *War Requiem*					**Verdi *Requiem***				
Requiem Aeternam					***Requiem e Kyrie***				
I (a) 'Requiem aeternam'	1	*Lento e solenne*	D minor	(2) Chorus: *parlante*	**I** (a) 'Requiem aeternam'	1	*Andante*	A minor - major	*Coro parlante*
(b) 'Te decet hymnus'	6	*Allegro*		(3) Boys' chorus with organ	(b) 'Te decet hymnus'	3	*Poco più*	F major	*Coro* unaccompanied (quasi-fugal)
(a') 'Requiem aeternam'	10	*Lento come sopra*		# (2) Varied repetition of (a) overlapping with boys' chorus	(a') 'Requiem aeternam'	5	*Come prima*	A minor - major	Varied repetition of (a)
II *Anthem for Doomed Youth*	16	*Allegro molto ed agitato*	B*b* minor – F major	(1) Solo: tenor (AB)					
III 'Kyrie eleison'	19	*Molto lento*	F major	(2) Chorus (homophony)	**II** (c) 'Kyrie eleison'	8	*Animando un poco*	A major	*Coro concertato*
					(c')	14	*poco allargando*		*Coro concertato*

Dies irae

*** I** 'Dies Irae' 'Tuba mirum' 'Mors stupebit'	20	*Allegro*	G minor	(2) Chorus, with brass fanfares
II *Bugles Sang*	28	*Tran-quillo, poco, più lento, senza rigore*	Leading to A major	(1) Solo: baritone, with brass fanfares
III 'Liber scriptus' 'Quid sum miser' 'Rex tremendae'	32	*Lento e maesto -so*	C major - A major	(2) '*Aria con pertichini*': soprano

Dies irae

*** I** 'Dies irae'	22	*Allegro agitato*	G minor	*Coro*, with brass fanfares
II	32	*Allegro sosten-uto – animan -do poco a poco*	A*b* minor	Orchestral *intermezzo* with trumpet fanfares, involving four 'off-stage' trumpets
III 'Tuba mirum'	34			*Coro*
IV 'Mors stupebit'	37	*Molto meno mosso*	A major – D minor	*Scena*: bass
V 'Liber scriptus'	39	*Allegro molto sostenu to*	D minor	*Aria con pertichini*: mezzo-soprano (A A' B C)
*** VI** 'Dies irae'	44	*Allegro come prima*	G minor	*Coro* Shortened repetition of 'Dies irae'

					VII 'Quid sum miser'	50	*Adagio*		*Terzetto*: soprano, mezzo-soprano, tenor
					VIII 'Rex tremendae' with 'Salve me'	56	*Adagio maesto -so*	C minor – C major	*Concertato*: soprano, mezzo-soprano, tenor, bass, *coro*
IV *The Next War*	37	*Allegro e giocoso*	A major	(1) Duet: tenor and baritone					
V 'Recordare' 'Ingemisco'	44	*Lento - Con moto*	B*b* major/ G minor	(2) Chorus (split female v. male)	**IX** 'Recordare'	71	*Adagio maesto -so – animan -do sempre*	F major	*Duetto*: soprano, mezzo-soprano
					X 'Ingemisco'	76	*Poco meno mosso*	F major - E*b* major	*Scena ed aria*: tenor (A A' B C)
VI 'Confutatis maledictus'	50	*Allegro*	G major	(2) Chorus	**XI** 'Confutatis maledictus'	80	*Andan- te*	E major	*Scena ed aria*: bass (A B A' C B)

VII *On Seeing a Piece of our Artillery Brought into Action*	56	*Molto larga-mente*	C major	(1) Solo: baritone
*** VIII** 'Dies Irae'	58	*Allegro come sopra*	G minor	Chorus Shortened repetition of 'Dies irae'
IX 'Lacrimosa'	62	*Molto lento*	D*b* major	# Solo: soprano, overlapping with chorus 'Dies irae'
X *Futility*	66		A major v. D*b*	# Solo: tenor, overlapping with chorus 'Lacrimosa'
XI 'Pie Jesu'	71	*Molto lento*	F major	Chorus Varied repeat of 'Kyrie eleison'
*** XII** 'Dies irae'	84	*Allegro come prima*	G minor	*Coro* Shortened repeat of 'Dies irae'
XIII 'Lacrymosa' and 'Pie Jesu'	90	*Largo*	B*b* minor – major	*Concertato*: soprano, mezzo, tenor, bass, *coro*

	Offertorium					*Offertorium*				
A	**I** 'Domine Jesu'	72	*Largamente – Animato*	C# minor	(3) Boys' choir – (2) chorus	**I** 'Domine Jesu Christe'	106	*Andante mosso*	A*b* major	*Quartetto*: soprano, mezzo-soprano, tenor, bass
	*** II** 'Quam olim Abrahae'	77		G major	(2) Chorus Fugue theme derived from *Canticle II*: 'Father, I am all ready'	**II** 'Quam olim Abrahae'	113	*Allegro mosso*	F minor – A*b* major	*Coro* (quasi-fugue)
B	**III** (a) *Parable of the Old Man and the Young*	85	*Deliberamente – Lento e misurato – Allegro*	G major	(1) Solos: Baritone/tenor					
	(b) 'An Angel'	88	*Lento recitativo*	C major	(1) Duet: Baritone/tenor Recalls the 'voice of God' in *Canticle II*					
	(a')	90	*Come Sopra – Pesante*	A major	(1) Varied repeat of (a)					
A'	**IV** 'Hostias'	91		E major v. C major	# (3) Boys' chorus, overlapping with baritone and tenor duet	**III** 'Hostias'	116	*Adagio*	C major	*Coro concertato*

*** V** 'Quam olim Abrahae'	95	G major – E minor	(2) Shortened recapitulation of II	**II' (Recap. of II)** 'Quam olim Abrahae'	121	*Allegro mosso*	F minor – A*b* major	Varied recapitulation of II
				I' (Recap. of I) 'Libera animus'	126	*Andante mosso*	A*b* major	Varied recapitulation of I

Sanctus
War Requiem

I 'Sanctus'	103	*Libera-mente*	G major v. B major	(2) Solo: soprano
II 'Pleni sunt coeli'	104	*Lento*	D major/ B minor	(2) Chorus
III 'Hosanna'	108	*Brillan-te*	D major	(2) Chorus
IV 'Benedictus	113	*Molto tran-quillo*		(2) '*Aria con pertichini*': soprano
V (Shortened recap. of III) 'Hosanna'	118	*Brillan-te (come sopra)*		(2) Shortened recapitulation of III
VI *The End*	120	*Molto lento – Agitato e string-edo*	C major	(1) Solo: baritone

Sanctus
Requiem

I 'Sanctus'	129	*Allegro*	F major	*Coro doppio: introduzione*
II 'Sanctus' ('Hosanna', Benedictus')	131			*Fuga doppia*
III 'Pleni sunt coeli' 'Hosanna'	143			*Coro*

Agnus dei					***Agnus dei***				
I | a 'Agnus dei' |'One ever hangs'	125	*Lento*	B minor	# (1-2) Tenor – chorus	**I** 'Agnus dei'	154	*Andante*	C major	'*Canto popolare*': soprano/mezzo-soprano
						155			*Coro* repetition
I' | b 'Agnus dei' |'Near Golgotha'	126			# (1-2) Tenor – chorus	**I'** 'Dona nobis requiem'	156			'*Canto popolare*': soprano/mezzo-soprano
						158			*Coro* repetition, with last two phrases of melody harmonized
I'' | a' 'Agnus dei' |'The scribes'	128			# (1-2) Tenor – chorus – tenor	**I''** 'Agnus dei'	159			'*Canto popolare*': soprano/mezzo-soprano Full melody with elaborated accompaniment
						160			'*Canto popolare*': soprano/mezzo-soprano, with *coro* Last two phrases of melody harmonized with elaborated accompaniment
Coda 'Dona eis requiem'	129			# (2) Chorus, with final tenor solo to Britten's added text ('Dona nobis pacem')	**Coda** 'Dona eis requiem'	161			'*Canto popolare*': soprano/mezzo-soprano, with *coro*

Libera me				
I (a) 'Libera me' 'Quando caeli' 'Libera me'	130	*Marcia accel.*	G minor	(2) Chorus *parlante*
(b) 'Dum veneris' 'Libera me'	137			(2) Chorus
(c) 'Tremens factus'	141	*Più allegro*		(2) Aria: soprano
(d) 'Libera me'	145	*Molto allegro*		(2) Chorus
II (a) *Dies irae*	150	*Allegro*		(2) Chorus Interjection of 'Dies irae'

Libera me				
I (a) 'Libera me'	174	*Moderato*	C minor	*Recitativo*: soprano *parlante*
(b) 'Dum veneris'	176			*Tempo d'attacco*: soprano
(c) 'Tremens factus'	176			*Aria*: soprano (2 strophes)
II *Dies irae*	178	*Allegro agitato*	G minor	*Coro* Varied repetition of 'Dies irae'
III 'Requiem aeternam'	189	*Andante*	B*b* minor – major	*Coro*, with soprano

(b)'Libera me'	154	*Molto larga-mente con prima*		(2) Chorus
III (a) *Strange Meeting*	157	*Lento e tranquil -lo*	Bb/G	(1) *Recitative*: tenor
(b) '"None" said the other'	159			(1) *Recitative*: baritone
IV (a)'Let us sleep now' | 'In paradisum'	165	*Molto tranquil -lo al fine*	A major/ Lydian mode on D	# (1-3) Duet: tenor and baritone v. boys' choir
(b)	167			# (1-2-3)Expansion to full chorus
IV (a) 'Libera me'	193		B*b* major – C minor	*Recitativo*: soprano
(b) 'Libera me'	193	*Allegro resoluto*	C minor	*Coro fuga* (ABA')
(c) 'Dum veneris'	201			*Tempo d'attacco*
(d) 'Dominae'	203			*Preghiera*: soprano, with *coro*
(e) 'Libera me'	208			*Coro* with soloists

(c) 'Requiem aeternum'	176		A major v. G major	# (1-2-3) Addition of boy's chorus
(d)'Requies -cant in pace'	179	*Molto lento*	F major	(2) Chorus: Varied repetition of 'Kyrie eleison'